

CONFLICT RESOLUTION SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF SATISFIED
MARRIAGES ACROSS 16 DOMAINS OF MARITAL CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this paper was to examine satisfied marriages with the intent to better understand conflict resolution within these marriages. Conflict resolution satisfaction was introduced as a new variable in the study of marital conflict. In addition, conflict resolution was studied as it occurs over a variety of domains within marriage. A sample of 60 married couples with children living at home were administered a questionnaire assessing their level of marital satisfaction in addition to several variables concerning their resolution of conflict across 16 domains.

Satisfied spouses were found to vary their conflict resolution strategies across domains of marriage. Husbands and wives did not use different conflict resolution strategies from one another. A high level of conflict resolution satisfaction was found to result in higher levels of marital satisfaction. Importance of the area of conflict and the conflict resolution strategy affected the level of conflict resolution satisfaction. Suggestions were made to marriage and family therapists on the basis of the results.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Marriages within the United States are very vulnerable. Latest estimates state that between 50% and 67% of marriages will end in divorce. Estimates of divorce for second marriages are even greater (Gottman, 1998).

Several longitudinal studies have placed destructive conflict behaviors as one of the leading risk factors for divorce and marital distress (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995). Destructive conflict in marriages has also been linked to depression, negative outcomes for children including conduct problems, juvenile delinquency, physical health, violence, and many forms of dysfunction and psychopathology (Gottman, 1998; Stanley et al., 1995).

There have been many studies that investigated the destructive conflict behaviors within dissatisfied marriages, but few studies have focused on the positive conflict behaviors of satisfied marriages and how these may vary across conflict areas. Focusing on satisfied married couples may help practitioners better understand how to help dissatisfied couples. Understanding strategies that satisfied couples use in resolving conflict in various contexts may provide therapists with insights needed to assist couples in crisis.

Statement of the Problem

Many theories have been used to investigate marital satisfaction (Chafetz, 1980; Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Epstein, Baucom, & Rankin, 1993; Fincham, 1997; Gottman, 1993, 1998; Granvold, 1998; Klinetob & Smith, 1996; Larson, Hammond, & Harper, 1998; Long, Cate, Fehsenfeld, & Williams, 1996; McGonagle, Kessler, & Gotlib, 1993; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Storaasli & Markman, 1990; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996; Zak, 1998). Some studies have linked marital satisfaction with conflict resolution styles and found that some conflict resolution styles are associated with higher marital satisfaction than other conflict resolution styles (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Markman, 1991; Stanley et al., 1995).

Satisfaction with various components of conflict resolution has also been briefly addressed in some of the literature (McGonagle et al., 1993; Fowers et al., 1996; Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1982). These studies found that distressed and non-distressed couples varied in their styles of conflict resolution and how satisfied they were with the outcome of their disagreements. However, no studies have investigated how both conflict resolution strategies and satisfaction with the strategy of conflict resolution differ among satisfied couples across conflict areas, outcome, and importance levels of conflict areas. In addition, few studies have investigated satisfied couples with regard to conflict as compared to the numerous studies focusing on distressed couples. This study addressed how conflict resolution satisfaction relates to conflict resolution strategy,

conflict areas, and the importance of various conflict areas among satisfied married couples.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand how conflict resolution satisfaction varies in relation to conflict resolution strategy and importance of the conflict across a variety of conflict areas according to the importance of the conflict area within satisfied marriages. This study also investigated how conflict resolution satisfaction and outcome relates to conflict strategy, conflict area, and overall marital satisfaction. The results of this study provide researchers with a better understanding of how spouses in healthy marriages manage conflict in a dynamic way. Marital therapists may benefit from knowing how maritally satisfied couples vary their management of conflict in different ways and across different domains. Therapists may also benefit by knowing whether the particular strategy of conflict resolution solely dictates the level of marital satisfaction or if marital satisfaction is also impacted with the satisfaction level that the spouses have with their particular strategy of conflict resolution. Thus, if conflict resolution satisfaction is high with a particular strategy of conflict, it may not necessarily be wrong for certain couples when used in specific circumstances. Marital therapists can then spend valuable session time working on other issues that may be of concern to these couples.

Hypotheses

This study examined the relationships between conflict resolution strategy, conflict resolution satisfaction, conflict outcome, conflict area, conflict importance, and marital satisfaction. Conflict resolution satisfaction in this study not only included an evaluation of spouses' feelings about conflict resolution outcome, but it also included spouses' evaluations of their own and their spouses' behaviors.

Hypothesis 1. Spouses who exhibit a high level of conflict resolution satisfaction will have a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction than spouses who exhibit a low level of conflict resolution satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2. Women will have significantly lower levels of conflict resolution satisfaction than men.

Hypothesis 3. Men and women will use significantly different conflict resolution strategies to resolve conflict within their marriages.

Hypothesis 4. Men and women will rate different areas of conflict as having significantly different levels of importance in their relationships.

Hypothesis 5. Men and women will have significantly different levels of conflict resolution satisfaction depending on the importance of the area of conflict.

Hypothesis 6. Men and women will use significantly different conflict resolution strategies depending on the area of conflict.

Hypothesis 7. Spouses will have significantly different levels of conflict resolution satisfaction depending on conflict outcome.

Hypothesis 8. Spouses who use problem solving strategies such as validation and contracting will have significantly more conflict resolution satisfaction than those who use competition, avoidance, or yielding.

Definitions

Conflict. Fincham and Bradbury (1991) define conflict as incompatible goals of two people in a relationship. One person pursues a goal and this prevents the other person from attaining his or her goals. Epstein et al. (1993) state that conflict does not necessarily mean that one person is overtly pursuing his or her personal goals. Rather, what is required for conflict to be present is that the other person is aware that incompatible goals exist, and he or she anticipates that the other person will interfere in his or her goal attainment. Therefore, according to Epstein et al. (1993), marital conflict can occur cognitively and behaviorally.

Conflict resolution strategies. This study operationally defined conflict resolution strategy as the category that each respondent selects to describe his or her normal way of managing conflict within a particular domain of marriage. Conflict strategies included yielding, avoidance, competition, and problem solving (Fitzpatrick, 1988)

Yielding. Yielding is defined as a strategy of conflict resolution in which a participant retreats from conflict by quickly submitting to his or her partner's wishes (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Avoidance. Avoidance is defined as a strategy of conflict resolution in which an individual approaches an issue abstractly, denies that a problem exist, or does not take the conflict seriously (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Competition. Competition is defined as a strategy of conflict resolution in which an individual tries to force the other party to submit, often by using persuasive strategies (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Validation. Validation is defined as a strategy of conflict resolution that is problem solving. Validation occurs when one spouse acknowledges the other's feelings while trying to come to an agreement (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Contracting. Contracting is defined as a strategy of conflict resolution that is problem solving. Contracting occurs when the spouses work together to find solutions to conflict that satisfies the goals of both spouses (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Stages of conflict. Christensen and Pasch (1993) viewed conflict as developing through seven sequential stages. These stages include (a) conflict of interest, (b) a stressful circumstance, (c) precipitating incident during which overt conflict can be observed, (d) engagement or avoidance of discussion, (e) interactional senario if engagement has been selected in stage four, (f) an immediate outcome when the initial discussion is over, and (g) return to normal. Conflict resolution in this study will include the behaviors that occur in stages d through g.

Conflict resolution satisfaction. This is defined as the score received on the conflict resolution satisfaction measure. This is meant to assess how pleased each spouse is with the method of conflict resolution experienced during marital disputes.

Marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is defined as the score received on the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS). A satisfied person will be one who scores above a 9, and a dissatisfied person will be one who scores below a 9.

Conflict area. Conflict area is defined as one of several domains of marriage in which conflict may occur. The conflict areas for this study are finances, recreation, religion, affection, sex, friends, social behaviors, philosophy of life, parents/in-laws, goals, leisure time, household tasks, decision making, time spent together, career decisions, and childrearing.

Conflict outcome. Conflict outcome is defined as the respondent's opinion of whether conflict is usually resolved in his or her favor, the spouse's favor, remains unresolved, or in favor of both spouses.

Conflict importance. Conflict importance is defined as the respondent's rating of how important a particular area of conflict is in his or her relationship with his or her spouse.

Delimitations

This study was limited to married couples that have been married for at least one year and have at least one child. Couples who have been married for less than a year may

not yet have established patterns of conflict. In addition, couples who are newly married will tend to idealize their spouses as well as their marriages. This may not give an accurate view of the way that conflict is related to marital satisfaction. Couples who have at least one child differ from childless couples in the areas of conflict that may occur in their marriages. In addition, marital satisfaction may differ for couples with at least one child (Belsky & Pensky, 1988; White, Booth & Edwards, 1986).

This sample will also be a nonprobability convenience sample. It is assumed that couples solicited randomly for participation will many times decline participation leading to a self-selecting bias. Therefore, it will be more efficient to solicit couples in various areas of the community who may be more interested in participating than the community as a whole.

Summary

The percentage of married couples that divorce each year is between 50% and 67% (Gottman, 1998). Such high percentages support the need for continued research in various aspects of marital conflict and marital satisfaction. While researchers have investigated several factors of marital satisfaction including conflict resolution strategies, little attention has been paid to conflict resolution satisfaction. This study investigated conflict resolution strategies and conflict resolution satisfaction as they vary across

conflict areas and in importance among satisfied married couples. Results of this study may have important implications for marital therapists.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Longitudinal studies have found destructive conflict to be one of the greatest risk factors for marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Stanley et al., 1995; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). Indeed, research with distressed and nondistressed couples has found conflict styles to distinguish between amount of relationship quality and stability (McGonagle et al., 1993). A difference in conflict behavior has not been the only variable studied in relation to marital satisfaction. Spouses' cognitions about conflict in general have also been found to relate to marital satisfaction (Crohan, 1992). However, no research has been found which investigated not only (1) conflict resolution styles and their impact on marital satisfaction but also (2) cognitions about the conflict process and how these are combined with (3) conflict resolution styles to impact marital satisfaction.

Conflict research has not been guided by one unifying theory. Instead, conflict research has been guided by a variety of theories and conceptual frameworks. This study will use Gottman's (1998) Balance Theory of Marriage to develop hypotheses to investigate the relationship between conflict resolution style, conflict resolution satisfaction, areas of conflict, importance of conflict areas, and marital satisfaction.

This chapter will include a review of various theories and conceptual frameworks that have been used to study conflict in marriages. In addition, literature concerning

variables included in this study will be presented. These variables include conflict resolution styles or strategies, conflict resolution satisfaction, and marital satisfaction.

Theories in Conflict Research

Balance theory. Gottman (1998) has developed his own balance theory specifically for the study of marital conflict. According to this theory, negative and positive behaviors in a marriage tend to remain at a set point. If the amount of positivity is greater than the amount of negativity within the relationship, then marital satisfaction will remain high. The concepts included in this theory are threefold. First, when spouses are incapable of soothing themselves and each other when they are agitated, negative affect reciprocity will occur. Negative affect reciprocity is a difficult state to exit once it is entered. Negative affect reciprocity is the failure of repair attempts once conflict has begun. Negative affect reciprocity has been associated with couples who are dissatisfied with their marriages. Satisfied couples have been found to use particular mechanisms to exit negative affect (Gottman, 1993). Negative reciprocity of affect is not considered dysfunctional according to this model unless “it not balanced with about five times the positivity and when there are high levels of complaining, criticizing, defensiveness, contempt, and disgust” (Gottman, 1993, p. 14). These mechanisms “include metacommunication, feeling probes that explore feelings, information exchange, social comparison, humor, distraction, gossip, finding areas of common ground, and appeals to basic philosophy and expectations in the marriage.” (Gottman, 1998, p. 180) The second

concept included in the Balance Theory of Marriage is that the lack of soothing taking place within marriages contributes to relapses after marital therapy. Third, husbands' withdrawing from listening (stonewalling) increases their physiological arousal, which in turn increases negative reciprocity (Gottman, 1998).

Support of the Balance Theory of Marriage is provided by Gottman (1993). The author summed the positive and negative speaker codes of the participants. He then statistically compared these summations between stable couples and unstable couples. The findings showed a ratio of 5.10 for stable husbands and 5.06 for stable wives. The ratio for unstable husbands was 1.06 and 0.67 for unstable wives. Stable couple types (validators, volatiles, and avoiders) were more likely to counteract negative behaviors with positive ones. Validators were found to select appropriate times to disagree and confront the conflict. In addition, validators were able to convey some support to their partners' negative comments. Volatiles expressed negativity but counteracted this negativity with ample laughter, passion, and romance. Avoiders minimized the importance of disagreement leading to calm interactions. However, this group had more emotional distance in their marriages (Gottman, 1993).

Conflict theory. According to this theory, conflict cannot be avoided because it is part of human interactions. However, this theory does not support the idea that violence is a necessary tactic used to deal with conflict (Straus et al., 1996). Conflict theory also holds that change is introduced to systems through resolution of conflict, and humans are mostly self-interested (Long et al., 1996).

Individual differences. A conceptual framework associated with the conflict literature is one based on gender called individual differences. According to this framework, men and women have different physiological characteristics and socialization (Klinetob & Smith, 1996). Socialization teaches women to be affiliative, whereas men are taught to be autonomous. This may affect the amount of intimacy that men and women want. Differences in desired intimacy lead to conflict. Social structures also create power differences between men and women that determine demand-withdraw roles. The physiological differences that impact conflict are that men are more aroused than women during conflict resolution. Thus, men find conflict to be more draining than women and will avoid conflict when possible (Klinetob & Smith, 1996).

Social exchange theory. According to this theory, if the relationship costs including conflict outweigh the benefits of the relationships, then the marriage will be less successful and at risk for dissolution (Granvold, 1998; McGonagle et al., 1993). Conflict may occur as people seek to maximize their profits by minimizing costs and maximizing rewards in relationships. Social exchange theory also holds that, during a conflict, people will act in ways to maximize their chance of getting the outcome they desire (Chafetz, 1980).

Attribution theory. This theory has been applied to conflict research by examining spousal perceptions of disagreements (Zak, 1998). Attribution is closely related to social exchange theory in that meanings assigned to spousal behavior may

contribute to whether a person counts a spouse's behavior as a cost or benefit (Granvold, 1998; Fincham, 1997).

Cognitive model. This model has combined elements of attribution theory and social exchange theory. The cognitive elements of conflict include selective attention, attribution of behaviors, expectancies, and assumptions and standards of one's ideal relationships (Epstein et al., 1993).

Equity theory. Another theory used to study marital conflict that is similar to social exchange theory is equity theory. According to this theory, spouses will have greater marital satisfaction if they view their relationship as being fair. If rewards of the current relationship are greater than the rewards of finding another relationship, then the relationship will be more acceptable. However, if the costs of the current relationship (including conflict) are greater than the costs of finding another relationship, then the relationship will be less satisfying. Therefore, equity is a balance of the rewards and costs perceived by each person in a relationship (Larson et al., 1998).

Social learning model. This model holds that couples' interactions determine their relationship functioning. Positive interactions improve evaluations of relationships by those involved, and negative interactions bring poorer evaluations (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

Vulnerability-stress-adaptation (VSA) model. This model states that enduring vulnerabilities influence marital quality. Enduring vulnerabilities are stable characteristics that the spouses bring to their marriages. Stressful events, both expected

and unexpected, also affect marital quality. The adaptive processes that the spouses use to deal with problems and conflict as well as the way they appraise these processes mediates the effect that enduring vulnerabilities and stressful events have on marital quality (Cohan & Bradbury, 1997).

Family developmental theory. Family development theory asserts that families must go through transition stages as they proceed through life. One of the themes of this theory is that the life stages are associated with normative life transitions. During these transitions, families must modify or assume new roles and take on new responsibilities. These stages are stressful times due to a lack of preparedness to adapt to the new situations; therefore, conflict can easily arise (Storaasli & Markman, 1990).

It is clear from reviewing the conflict literature that many theories have been used to guide studies. Except for the Balance Theory of Marriage and conflict theory, researchers have not used theories specifically designed for investigating conflict. In addition, this area of research lacks a unifying theory that drives future research (Gottman, 1998). It is difficult for each theory to be supported or refuted for application to the realm of marital conflict when few studies are conducted using the same theory.

Conflict Resolution Strategies and Styles

Conflict resolution styles and strategies have been investigated by many conflict researchers. The conflict resolution styles and strategies vary from study to study depending on the survey or coding system used for classification.

Marital Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict resolution strategies have been described by Fitzpatrick (1988). Fitzpatrick categorized types of marital couples in terms of the conflict resolution strategies that they used. Avoidance is described as “speaking abstractly about an issue, denying that a problem exists, and making jokes” (p. 246). Yielding is described as retreating from a conflict. “Spouses may lower their aspirations and settle for less than they would have liked. Included here may be some types of verbal compromises” (p. 247). Problem solving or co-operative strategies are described as “an alternative that satisfies the aspirations of both sides” (p. 247). Messages that are classified as problem-solving include validation or contracting. Competition or contending is trying to “impose one’s preferred solution on the other party” (p. 247). Messages that are classified as competition are those that “find fault with, or blame, the partner” (p. 247). Persuasive strategies, even when subtle, that are used to achieve one’s own goals can also be classified as competition.

Mackey and O’Brien (1998) studied 120 spouses in 60 marriages that were purposively selected because of their long marriages. Mackey and O’Brien (1998) found two conflict resolution styles, which were confrontation and avoidance. Whether one

style was better than the other depended on the context of each marriage, determined by the personal styles of each spouse (Mackey & O'Brien, 1998).

Rands, Levinger, and Mellinger (1981) identified four conflict resolution styles among 244 Northern California married couples selected from county marriage licenses and birth certificates. Conflict resolution styles were based on behaviors used in conflict resolution, expectations of conflict resolution outcome, and marital satisfaction. One style was nonintimate-aggressive, in which conflict easily escalated in intensity and spread to other issues. One subtype included some effort at compromise, whereas the other subgroup did not report such effort. Marital satisfaction was low in both subtypes of the nonintimate-aggressive couples. The second style of conflict resolution was nonintimate-nonaggressive. A lack of vitality and little intimacy after conflict characterized this type. However, there was little escalation of conflict. There were also two subtypes found among the nonintimate-nonaggressives. The first had some escalation of conflict but below average marital satisfaction. The second subtype had little escalation and higher than average marital satisfaction. The third type was labeled intimate-aggressive. Although these couples exhibited overt anger, they also enjoyed intimacy at the end of their conflict resolution. The two subtypes that were found among these couples were distinguishable by whether the couples' conflicts always resulted in greater intimacy or whether they sometimes did not. The couples who always experienced greater intimacy had higher than average marital satisfaction, but those who sometimes did not have greater intimacy after conflict resolution had lower than average

marital satisfaction. Intimate-nonaggressive couples were the fourth type. These couples' conflict resolution increased their intimacy and conflict resolution did not include attacks or blaming. One subtype called congenial spouses avoided full discussion of conflict-arousing issues. Another subtype, referred to as expressive spouses, confronted important issues and had higher levels of marital satisfaction than the congenial couples (Rands et al., 1981).

Conflict Resolution Strategies and Behavior

Acitelli, Douvan, and Veroff (1993) studied conflict resolution during the first year of marriage. Their sample included 219 couples selected from marriage licenses issued in Wayne County, Michigan. These researchers categorized conflict as being either constructive or destructive. Conflict behaviors that were considered destructive were: insulting one another, threatening one's spouse, bringing the spouse's family into the argument, having to have the last word, and bringing up things that happened in the past. Behaviors that were classified as constructive were: calmly discussing the problem, finding out what the spouse is feeling, saying nice things, attempting compromise, suggesting new ways of perceiving the situation, and listening to the spouse's point of view (Acitelli et al., 1993).

Fowers et al. (1996) examined conflict resolution behaviors using their PREPARE inventory and classified couples into four types. These researchers viewed typologies as a way to bridge the gap between theory, research, and practice by tailoring their premarital education program for each type. Their types included vitalized couples,

harmonious couples, traditional couples, and conflicted couples. Vitalized couples reported comfort in discussing their feelings and resolving problems together.

Harmonious couples also had effective conflict resolution but did not have as high a level of marital satisfaction as the vitalized couples. Traditional couples were less comfortable when disclosing feelings and had less ability to resolve conflicts. Conflicted couples lacked the communication skills in all areas especially during conflict resolution (Fowers et al., 1996).

Conflict Resolution Strategies and Interpersonal Dimensions

Thomsen and Gilbert (1998) classified conflict resolution styles according to how 64 spouses in 32 marriages were scored on four interpersonal dimensions. The subjects were recruited at a small Midwestern university and were paid to participate. Spouses were scored on dimensions that included dominance, attentiveness, engagement, and affiliation-hostility. Dominance was having control of the discussion. Attentiveness was the ability of spouses to give evidence of listening. Engagement was the level of interpersonal involvement. Active behavior was assumed to be more effective, but excessive engagement would include becoming defensive and impulsive. Affiliation-hostility was the affective dimension of conflict resolution. All of these dimensions were combined to form different conflict resolution styles (Thomsen & Gilbert, 1998).

Burman, Margolin, and John (1993) classified conflict resolution according to the amount of anger present during conflict discussions of 65 couples from a previous study who were originally "recruited to participate in an extensive study of marital conflict" (p.

29). Recruitment took place through radio announcements, newspaper advertisements, and talks to the community (Margolin, John, & Gleberman, 1988). Physically aggressive couples were hostile to each other and were very reactive (Burman et al., 1993). Once anger emerged in these couples, it was not likely that they would exhibit positive or neutral behaviors. Nondistressed couples had more positive behaviors interspersed throughout conflict resolution. Verbally aggressive couples became verbally aggressive in response to anger/contempt perceived in their spouses. Withdrawal and physical aggressiveness were the other conflict resolution styles found by these researchers (Burman et al., 1993). Pasch and Bradbury (1998) had similar classifications of conflict resolution styles. They studied 60 couples located through advertisements in California newspapers. These researchers also found husbands of distressed couples to be twice as likely as husbands of nondistressed couples to show anger and contempt during conflict (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

Another set of conflict resolution styles includes conflict avoidance and conflict engagement. Research has found that couples who avoid conflict actually have more conflict than conflict engagers, and conflict-avoidant couples are also at higher risk for marital dissolution (McGonagle et al., 1993). Christensen and Pasch (1993) discussed conflict engagers as being divided into two categories. Negative engagers displayed negative behaviors such as criticism, hostility, verbal attacks, and insults during conflict resolution. In the opposite manner of negative engagers, positive engagers revealed their feelings and perspectives on the problem in a cooperative manner. Positive engagers also

sought for areas of agreement and used compromise and negotiation to resolve their conflicts (Christensen & Pasch, 1993).

Gottman (1993) classified five styles of conflict resolution in couples after the couples had three conversations, including one that focused on conflict resolution. Couples participated in three conversations that were videotaped. The first conversation was based on events of the day, the second was conflict resolution, and the third was a pleasant topic. The videotapes were then coded to assess persuasion attempts, problem solving strategies, and specific emotions. Five negative emotions were coded (anger, disgust/contempt, sadness, fear, and whining), and four positive affects were coded (affection/caring, humor, interest/curiosity, or joy/enthusiasm). Two unstable couple types (hostile and hostile/detached) and three stable types (validating, volatile, and avoidant) were identified (see Table 1). Unstable couples exhibited more hostility. The husbands in stable couples displayed more affection, whined less, and were less angry. The wives in stable couples showed more joy and interest and less anger. This study analyzed couples on both speaker and listener axes. Stable couples were found to be less negative and more positive than the unstable couples. Along the listener axis were the groups labeled engagers and avoiders. Validators, volatiles, and hostiles composed the engagers group. Avoiders and hostile/detached couples composed the avoiders group (see Table1). There were some differences between these groups. Husbands' and wives' complain/criticize scores were higher in the engager group than in the avoider group. The hostile detached couples were less engaged as listeners than the hostile couples.

Conflict avoiders lacked specific strategies. They tended to focus on common ground rather than on conflict issues. Engagers tended to confront issues of conflict willingly. They openly disagreed and tried to persuade their partners. Volatile couples had a high level of positive and negative affect in their marriages. Validating couples had calmer conversations and expressed a medium amount of emotion when they talked about their conflict. Hostile couples had direct engagement in conflict and were attentive listeners. However, both partners displayed a great amount of defensiveness.

It was hypothesized that the three stable groups would differ on the amount and timing of persuasion attempts. It was also hypothesized that volatile couples would be highest in persuasion attempts, and these should be at the start of the interaction. Validating couples were expected to listen to each other in the beginning of the interaction, and their persuasion attempts were expected to be at the end of the conversation. Avoiders were expected to avoid persuasion throughout the interaction. These hypotheses were tested using a sample of 73 couples who were recruited in Indiana using newspaper advertisements. The hypotheses were supported by the results. The three groups were also tested for gender differences. Validators and volatile couples did not display gender differences in the three phases of discussion. The avoiders, however, did show a gender difference with the persuasion attempts of the wives in the first third and the persuasion attempts of the avoiding husbands in the last third of the discussion (Gottman, 1993).

Table 1

Couple Types According to Gottman (1993)

Stable (Less likely to consider or obtain a divorce)	versus	Unstable (More likely to consider or obtain a divorce)
Validators (Ease & calm when discussing conflict)		Hostile (Actively displays anger)
Volatiles (High levels of positive & negative affect)		Hostile/Detached (Displays anger in covert ways/ disengaged as listeners)
Avoiders (No specific resolution strategies)		

Conflict Resolution Strategies and Personality Characteristics

Personality and conflict behaviors have also been examined in order to classify couples. Buss (1991) found that low agreeableness and low emotional stability were personality characteristics of husbands' personality that were linked with behaviors that upset their wives. These behaviors included condescension, abuse, unfaithfulness, inconsiderateness, alcohol abuse, emotional constriction, and self-centeredness. Husbands upset their wives through condescension when they were high in surgency (dominant/submissive, bold/timid). Husbands low on conscientiousness (reliable/undependable, hard-working/lazy) tended to be unfaithful to their wives. For wives, low agreeableness (selfless/selfish, warm/cold) was the strongest predictor of

anger and upset in their husbands. The behaviors associated with low agreeableness in wives were condescension, possessive-dependent-jealous, unfaithfulness, and self-centeredness. Low emotional stability in wives was associated with husbands' being upset over possessiveness, dependency, and jealousy. Low intellect in wives was associated with emotional constriction and alcohol abuse. High surgency in wives was associated with being condescending, abusive, and physically self-absorbed. All of these personality characteristics associated with upset in spouses are potential areas for conflict (Buss, 1991).

Geist and Gilbert (1996) also studied personality and conflict. Rather than studying potential areas of conflict, these researchers studied conflict resolution behaviors with which particular personalities were associated. They found that introverted husbands were likely to display positive affect to smooth over conflict or withdraw during conflict resolutions whereas extroverted husbands expressed more negative affect and were focused on the problem that developed into conflict. Extroversion in wives was correlated with their own expressed anger and whining as well as their husbands' expressed anger and whining. However, extroversion in husbands was not correlated with expressed anger in their wives. Neuroticism in men was positively correlated with their own expressed anger and contempt/disgust and was negatively correlated with expressed positive affect in themselves. Neuroticism among women was correlated with negative felt affect and expressed affect. During conflict resolution, husbands may feel a building of aggression especially in the presence of extroverted

wives, and these husbands may not be able to effectively express their own escalating affect (Geist & Gilbert, 1996).

Sanders, Smith, and Alexander (1991) examined Type A and Type B personality combinations among spouses and how these related to conflict resolution. Two Type A individuals who were married displayed more hostile/dominant behavior during conflict resolution than other combinations, especially when the topic was one that was emotionally charged. Type B husband and Type A wife combinations had an intermediate level of hostile/dominant behaviors. Type A husbands and Type B wives as well as Type B husbands and Type B wives had less antagonism than the other personality combinations. This suggests that Type A wives elicited more hostile dominance from both Type A and Type B husbands. However, Type A husbands did not elicit such hostile/dominance behavior from their Type B wives (Sanders et al., 1991).

Newton, Keicolt-Glasser, Glasser, and Malarkey (1995) investigated hostile and defensive personality characteristics and found that husbands low in defensiveness and high in hostility had more conflict interactions. However, wives low in defensiveness and high in hostility tended to withdraw.

Areas of Conflict

For the past two decades, many research studies have been dedicated to evaluating marital conflict in terms of what domains within marriage were associated most frequently with conflict.

Goldberg (1987) listed six areas of marital conflict. These areas included money, sex, childrearing, in-laws, family planning, and substance abuse. However, he suggested that these major areas of marital conflict may overlap when power dynamics, trust, fidelity, intimacy, nurturance, and differences in personalities are taken into account.

Areas of Conflict and Gender

Gender differences and similarities in areas of marital conflict have also been investigated. According to a study by Eells and O'Flaherty (1996), the top ten areas for men and women contain many of the same topics but are ordered differently. Married women listed conflict areas in the following order according to perceived importance: (a) partner's ability to communicate feelings, (b) frequency of sexual relations, (c) adequate income, (d) expectations regarding who will perform household chores, (e) partner's ability to express anger, (f) partner's ability to listen to me, (g) my ability to communicate feelings, (h) I feel used or unappreciated in the relationship, (i) differing child discipline styles, and (j) my ability to express anger. Males ranked areas of marital conflict in the following order: (a) previous spouse interference with current marriage, (b) my ability to communicate feelings, (c) frequency of sexual relations, (d) my ability to express anger, (e) communication with our children from a previous marriage, (f) time

spent talking with partner, (g) adequate income, (h) one spouse's work requires substantial overtime, (i) differing child disciplining styles, (j) my ability to listen to my partner, and (j) (tied with previous) partner's ability to communicate feelings.

Areas of Conflict and Marital Stage

Areas of conflict have been investigated according to the stage of marriage. Storaasli and Markman (1990) investigated areas of conflict in early marriage. They surveyed a sample of 131 premarital couples using the Relationship Problem Inventory and the Marital Adjustment Test (Knox, 1971; Locke & Wallace, 1959). These couples were followed longitudinally at 12 weeks, 18 months, 3 years, 4 years, and 5 years. The results showed that areas of conflict that were salient to the couples shifted over time. "Relatives, jealousy, friends, and religion were more intense problems areas premaritally but significantly less intense after marriage" (Storaasli & Markman, 1990, p. 92). Three problem areas including communication, sex, and recreation became more pronounced after marriage. Throughout all of the stages of marriage that were examined, finances, alcohol/drugs, and children as areas of conflict did not vary in importance. Finances were ranked as first or second among the top three conflict areas in each stage of the study. Although children did not increase as an area of conflict during early parenthood, conflict increases in sex, communication, and recreation during this stage were found (Storaasli & Markman, 1990).

Sternberg and Beier (1977) also reported how conflict varied during the early stages of marriage according to gender. Newlywed husbands most frequently reported

politics, religion, and money as being the most conflicted areas of their marriages. One year later, these same husbands rated money first, politics second, and sex third as related to amount of conflict within their marriages. Newlywed wives initially ranked conflict areas of friends, politics, and money as being most relevant. A year later, this same group of women ranked money as first, friends as second, and sex as third. The authors concluded that the topics that are most often conflictual for young married couples are sex, money, and concern for each other (Sternberg, & Beier, 1977).

Belsky and Pensky (1988) reviewed the transition to parenthood and concluded that the areas of conflict were affected by this change. Division of labor, decreases in leisure time, and decreases in amount of positive interactions were described as being more salient to new parents. Belsky and Pensky (1988) suggested that the division of labor is the major area of conflict to new parents and that the wife's work status, differences in childrearing attitudes, and changes in the sexual relationship need to be investigated further in association with the transition to parenthood.

Areas of Conflict and Marital Success

Areas of marital conflict have also been compared between successful and conflictive marital couples. Mitchell, Bullard, and Mudd (1962) surveyed 100 successful spouses and 200 conflictive spouses to evaluate differences in the topics over which these couples fought. These researchers concluded that the two groups were similar in the areas over which they fought the most and the least. In addition there was agreement between the successful and conflictive spouses as to their areas of conflict. The main

difference found between the successful spouses and the conflictive spouses was the frequency of their disagreements rather than the area of conflict (Mitchell et al., 1962). The combined responses of the two groups were ranked from the area of most conflict to the area of least conflict. The list was as follows: (a) finances, (b) household management, (c) personality disagreements, (d) sexual adjustment, (e) sharing household tasks, (f) children, (g) recreation, (h) husband's mother, (i) personal habits, (j) jealousy, (k) husband's work, (l) wife's mother, (m) other relatives, (n) wife's working, (o) husband's father, (p) religious matters, (q) infidelity, (r) health, (s) wife's father, (t) social background, and (u) education (Mitchell et al., 1962).

Areas of Conflict and Instrumentation

Instruments focusing specifically on areas of conflict have been constructed. The Marital Problems Questionnaire (MPQ) was developed to assess marital adjustment and divorce risk (Douglass & Douglass, 1995). The MPQ assesses conflict in 39 problems areas. The conflict areas are broken down into specific areas such as husband's friends and wife's friends. However, the conflict areas can easily be grouped into larger categories such as friends, family, job, social behaviors, crisis support, religion, sex, finances, goals and priorities, leisure time, communication, children, and addictive behaviors (Douglass & Douglass, 1995).

The Comprehensive Areas of Change Questionnaire (CAC) was designed to assess the presenting complaints or problems of marital couples related to behavior (Mead, Vatcher, Wyne, & Roberts, 1990). The CAC evaluates couples according to 29

potential areas of conflict within their marriages. These 29 areas include: communication, expectations, affection, loving feelings, sex, power struggles, problem solving, finances, values, roles, children, serious individual problems, affairs, household management, in-laws/relatives, conventionality, jealousy, employment, leisure time, alcoholism, prior-marriage, psychosomatic illnesses, friends, addiction, personal habits/appearance, physical abuse, religion, health/physical handicaps, and incest (Mead et al., 1990).

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) is another instrument that investigates various areas of conflict in marriage (Spanier, 1976). The DAS is composed of four subscales. These are (a) dyadic consensus, (b) dyadic satisfaction, (c) dyadic cohesion, and (d) affectional expression. The areas of conflict that appear in the DAS are finances, recreation, religion, affection, sex, friends, social behaviors, philosophy of life, parents/inlaws, goals, leisure time, household tasks, decision making, time spent together, and career decisions (Spanier, 1976).

Although not designed specifically to assess conflict areas in marriage, PREPARE is an inventory that was designed to evaluate relationship strengths and weaknesses in various relationship areas (Olson et al., 1982). These relationship areas are similar to the identified areas of conflict by other studies. The relationship areas included in the PREPARE are: (a) realistic expectations, (b) personality issues, (c) communication, (d) conflict resolution, (e) financial management, (f) leisure activities, (g) sexual relationship, (h) children and marriage, (i) family and friends, (j) equalitarian

roles, and (k) religious orientation. PREPARE evaluates each of these relationship areas according to the amount of agreement that potential spouses have in their responses (Olson et al., 1982). Thus, potential conflict is detected for each area of the relationship.

Conflict and Marital Satisfaction

Researchers have investigated conflict resolution behaviors that separate satisfied couples from dissatisfied couples. It is very important that marriages have reciprocity of positive exchanges (Gottman et al., 1977). Negativity, the opposite of positive exchanges, has shown itself to be a more detrimental behavior than positivity is a helpful behavior (Gottman, 1998). Negativity has not shown itself to be problematic during premarital relationships. However, negativity has been found to predict marital satisfaction two and a half to five years later (Markman, 1991). Negativity does not necessarily mean expressing negative feelings. Negative affect can be expressed constructively by expressing feelings about specific behaviors and by listening and validating the negative affect of one's partner (Markman, 1991). Negativity may be evoked by inequity between spouses. Such feelings of inequity were found to bring suspicion and therefore less positive conflict resolution (Larson et al., 1998). Gottman et al. (1977) and Gottman (1998) described processes that satisfied couples use when exiting a negative state of conflict resolution. These couples used metacommunication, feeling probes, social comparison, humor, distraction, information exchange, gossip, finding commonalities, and appeals to philosophy and marital expectations to avoid

escalation of negativity. Gottman (1998) also found that distressed couples were less likely to be able to exit negative cycles of conflict communication, and they attended to negative affect more than satisfied couples. Gottman (1998) evaluated the conflict literature for behaviors associated with dissatisfied couples. Behavioral characteristics found in these couples were: negative affect reciprocity, demand-withdraw conflict patterns, more negative than positive behaviors, and particular forms of negativity including criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. These four negative behaviors are referred to by Gottman as the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (Gottman, 1998, p. 184).

Fowers et al. (1996) found that marital satisfaction varied according to their four premarital couple types. Vitalized couples had the highest scores followed by harmonious, traditional, and conflicted couples in declining amounts (Fowers et al., 1996; Stanley et al., 1995). Destructive behaviors during conflict resolution have been associated with dissatisfaction in marriages, whereas constructive conflict resolution skills including leveling, focusing, editing, feedback, stop actions, and more validation were linked with higher marital satisfaction (Arellano & Markman, 1995).

Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1993) investigated areas of conflict for satisfied and dissatisfied couples. Dissatisfied couples had more conflict in all areas including money, communication, in-laws, sex, religion, recreation, friends, alcohol and drugs, children, and jealousy.

In addition, healthy marriages have more problem solving discussions to resolve their conflict (Billings, 1979). Hostility and a lack of warmth are behaviors that have also distinguished between dissatisfied couples and satisfied couples (Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996). Marital satisfaction has also been found to depend on whether conflict was followed by intimacy and on the level of hostility during conflict. If intimacy was low, then marital satisfaction varied according to whether or not there was escalation present during conflict. If intimacy was low, then marital satisfaction varied with whether or not the spouses were perceived to be likely to attack (Rands et al., 1981). Destructive conflict behaviors also include manipulation and coercion. Manipulation is present when a spouse uses indirect or dishonest means to get what he or she wants. Coercion is present when a spouse tries to overtly change his or her partner's behavior. These behaviors are often reinforced leading to negative escalation. When these behaviors are used, the problem bringing about conflict is less likely to be solved than if positive conflict behaviors are used (Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, & Callan, 1994).

Gottman et al. (1977) and Gottman (1982) found that the negative impact from conflict was more likely to impact dissatisfied than satisfied couples. There was also more negative reciprocity in dissatisfied couples than in satisfied couples. Billings (1979) also found support for these findings. Longitudinal studies have also found that couples who avoid conflict are less satisfied (Mackey & O'Brien, 1998; Noller et al., 1994). Dissatisfied couples have more self-summarizing than other-summarizing statements. They are also likely to enter a cross-complaining loop and less likely to bring

their conflict to a resolution (Gottman et al., 1977). Although there has been research to support the necessity of conflict resolution, there has also been research to link higher disagreement rates to dissatisfied couples. Thus, it is necessary to engage in resolution of conflict in order to alleviate it, but spending too much time in conflict resolution is linked with poor conflict resolution skills and lower marital satisfaction (McGonagle et al., 1993).

Conflict Resolution Satisfaction

Noller et al. (1994) reported no difference between low marital satisfaction couples and high marital satisfaction couples in the amount of guilt and distress they experienced after conflict resolution tasks. This may be interpreted as a level of conflict resolution satisfaction. Research has also shown wives to be less satisfied than husbands with the amount of success in resolving conflicts (Mackey & O'Brien, 1998). This research had spouses evaluate the outcome but did not include an evaluation of the conflict resolution styles used to attempt to resolve differences. McGonagle et al. (1993) examined the possibility that the effects of disagreement frequency are moderated by conflict resolution style and/or outcome. This study showed that conflict style, frequency of conflict, and outcome of conflict were interrelated. This study also had spouses evaluate the outcome of conflict, but did not have spouses evaluate the process of conflict resolution (McGonagle et al., 1993).

Summary

Many different theories have guided the research on conflict in marriages. The current study will use Gottman's Balance Theory of Marriage. According to this theory, satisfied marriages have more positive interactions than negative interactions. Conflict resolution among satisfied couples has less negative reciprocity. Several aspects of conflict including areas of conflict, importance of area of conflict, conflict outcome, conflict strategies, and conflict resolution satisfaction will be investigated among satisfied couples. Investigating satisfied couples will lead to a better understanding as to what in the overall conflict process is linked to successful marriages.

This review has shown a lack of research for conflict resolution satisfaction. However, satisfaction with conflict outcome has been linked to marital satisfaction (McGonagle et al., 1993). Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that a high level of conflict resolution satisfaction will be linked to a high level of marital satisfaction (Hypothesis 1).

Researchers have found that women are less satisfied with the amount of success in resolving conflicts than men (Mackey & O'Brien, 1998). It is therefore likely that women will also have less conflict resolution satisfaction than men (Hypothesis 2).

Most of the studies reviewed in this chapter did not investigate possible gender differences in use of various conflict resolution strategies. One study, however, did find some differences in their use of persuasion attempts (Gottman, 1993). It follows that

there may be more gender differences in the strategies that men and women use to resolve conflicts (Hypothesis 3).

Several studies in this review had respondents rate areas of conflict according to frequency in their marriage (Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Mitchell et al., 1962; Sternberg & Beier, 1977). Other studies had respondents rate areas of conflict according to importance to their relationship (Eells & O'Flaherty, 1996; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). Gender differences in importance of area of conflict was reported by Eells and O'Flaherty (1996). This study will also investigate possible gender differences in importance of conflict areas (Hypothesis 4).

If men and women do perceive different areas of conflict as having different levels of importance, it may affect the levels of conflict resolution satisfaction for each area of conflict (Hypothesis 5). This has yet to be investigated.

Studies on conflict resolution strategies have found some differences in the behavior of men and women when resolving conflict. However, there is a lack of research that investigates the ability of individuals to use different strategies to resolve different areas of conflict (Hypothesis 6).

McGonagle et al. (1993) investigated frequency of conflict and conflict outcome, however, the evaluation of conflict outcome (conflict process satisfaction) was not investigated according conflict outcome. It seems likely that levels of conflict satisfaction will vary according to whether or not an individual gets the outcome that was desired (Hypothesis 7). In addition, gender differences in the satisfaction with the

success rate of resolving conflicts points to possible gender differences in conflict process satisfaction and conflict outcome (Hypothesis 7).

According to the Balance Theory of Marriage, when positive interactions outnumber negative interactions, satisfaction with the relationship will likely occur (Gottman, 1998). Thus, spouses who use more positive strategies or resolving conflicts such as problem solving, validation, and contracting will have more satisfaction with the process of resolving the conflict (conflict resolution satisfaction) than those who engage in negative strategies such as competition, avoidance, or yielding (Hypothesis 8).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This quantitative study used a survey design. Surveys allow the respondents to reflect on previous conflicts and portray their conflict resolution strategies, conflict resolution satisfaction, and marital satisfaction as they usually occur. This method allows better understanding of the marriage through the respondents' perceptions rather than using a one-time observation by a researcher. Surveys allow data to be collected in a timely manner. This survey was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. This allowed the researcher to gather information within a limited amount of time.

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 matched couples that have been married for at least one year and have at least one child 18 years of age or less living at home. It is assumed that couples who have been married for at least one year are more likely to have a stable strategy of conflict resolution and are more likely to have varied amounts of marital satisfaction. Couples that have at least one child differ from childless couples in the areas of conflict that are shared (Belsky & Pensky, 1988). This will be a nonprobability convenience sample. Couples were recruited through local churches by the researcher.

Couples were also recruited by having fellow graduate students recruit couples who seemed to be satisfied with their marriages. Both spouses in the couples were asked to complete the questionnaires.

Instruments

Demographics A brief set of questions was used to record the demographics of the respondents. Items in this set included age, ethnicity, education level, religion, church attendance, number of marriages, and income level of the respondents. Respondents were also asked about the number of children living at home as well as the age and sex of each child.

Marital satisfaction

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) was used to assess marital satisfaction. The KMSS consists of three questions. These questions include: How satisfied are you with your spouse?, How satisfied are you with your marriage?, and How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse? (Burnett, 1987). The KMSS is a Likert-type scale in which the respondent's responses range from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied on a 7-point scale. This test is scored by summing the responses on the 3 items. The score range is 3 to 21. The KMSS was normed on 83 rural families and 98 urban families. The KMSS has an internal consistency of .91 for urban wives, .93 for rural wives, .84 for rural, and .84 for urban husbands (Burnett, 1987; Schumm, Milliken, Poresky, Bollman, & Jurich, 1983). The test-retest reliability over a 10-week

period is .71 (Burnett, 1987; Mitchell, Newell, & Schumm, 1983). The KMSS correlates significantly with 6 out of 10 items that form the Satisfaction subscale of the DAS (Burnett, 1987). The authors suggest using the KMSS when a limited space is available on a questionnaire (Burnett, 1987).

Conflict area, conflict resolution strategies, conflict process satisfaction, and outcome satisfaction

A questionnaire listing several areas of conflict was distributed. The respondents were asked to respond to a series of questions for each area of conflict. Conflict areas were taken from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). These areas included finances, recreation, religion, affection, sex, friends, social behavior, philosophy of life, parents/ in-laws, goals, leisure time, household tasks, decision making, time spent together, and career decisions. An additional domain suggested by the literature as an important area of conflict is childrearing (Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Douglass & Douglass, 1995; Goldberg, 1987; Mead et al., 1990; Mitchell et al., 1962; Olson et al., 1982; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). This was added to the areas of conflict in the questionnaire. The questions addressing each area of conflict included: How important is this conflict area to your relationship? (Likert-type scale 1-7), How do you generally attempt to resolve this conflict area? (choice from Fitzpatrick's (1988) conflict resolution strategies including avoidance, yielding, problem-solving, and competition), How satisfied are you with resolving this problem in this manner? (Likert-type scale 1-7), What is usually the outcome of this conflict area? (multiple choice from 4 outcomes:

favorable to wife, favorable to husband, favorable to both, unresolved), and How satisfied are you with this outcome? (Likert-type scale 1-7).

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted by the researcher to ascertain the clarity of the instructions and questionnaires. Five couples were recruited in the manner that the sample was recruited. Each couple was given a questionnaire packet to complete. Each spouse received his or her own set of questionnaires in the packet. Respondents were asked to complete each questionnaire and to make notes of questions on the questionnaires as they were completed.

The researcher made adjustments in the questions and the instructions based on feedback from respondents in the pilot study. The Likert scale corresponding to the importance of the area of conflict was corrected to include the full range of possibilities. The demographic question for income was changed to reflect household income. A question was added to ask the respondents' religion in addition to religious affiliation. Finally, instructions for completing and returning the questionnaire packets were made more concise. The questionnaire packets were then distributed to the actual sample.

Procedures

The researcher distributed questionnaire packets to all potential respondents. The packets included the demographics questionnaire, the marital satisfaction inventory, and the conflict resolution satisfaction questionnaire (see Appendix A). The cover letter

explained the purpose of the study, and gave instructions for completion, and requested the return of the questionnaires to the researcher (see Appendix B). A consent form was included for the participants to sign (see Appendix C). Participants were informed of the measures taken to insure confidentiality. These measures of confidentiality included instructions to complete the questionnaire in a different location or time than their spouses and to place the completed questionnaire in a sealed envelope. In addition, the consent form was separated from the questionnaires upon receipt by the researcher. Lastly, the consent forms were kept in a locked drawer. In addition, respondents were assured that the study was approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee at Texas Woman's University.

Human Subjects

The Human Subjects Review Committee at Texas Woman's University approved this research before any of the procedures took place. A statement of approval for the project and the telephone number of the Human Subjects Review Committee Office was provided for the participants on the consent form (Appendix C). This assured the participants that all ethical matters had been considered and that they were protected from harm.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 was that spouses who exhibit a high level of conflict resolution satisfaction will have a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction than spouses who exhibit a low level of conflict resolution. Again, husbands' and wives' scores were treated independently. The independent variables in this hypothesis were the level of conflict resolution satisfaction and gender. The dependent variable in this hypothesis was the level of marital satisfaction. An ANOVA was used to perform this analysis.

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 was that women would have lower levels of conflict resolution satisfaction than men. The independent variable in this hypothesis was gender while the dependent variable was conflict resolution satisfaction. A t-test was used to test for differences between males and females on conflict resolution satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3 Hypothesis 3 was that men and women will use significantly different conflict resolution strategies to resolve conflict within their marriages. Men and women were evaluated independently. The areas of conflict were treated as the independent variables. Conflict resolution strategies were treated as the dependent variables. A MANOVA was performed to determine significant differences.

Hypothesis 4 Hypothesis 4 was that men and women would rate different areas on conflict as having significantly different levels of importance in their relationships. The analysis was conducted separately for men and women. The areas of conflict were

treated as the independent variables while the level of importance were treated as the dependent variables. A MANOVA was performed to determine significant differences.

Hypothesis 5 Hypothesis 5 was that men and women would have different levels of conflict resolution satisfaction depending on the conflict resolution strategy and the importance of the area of conflict. Again, men and women were evaluated independently. Importance of the area of conflict was treated as the independent variable while the level of conflict resolution satisfaction was treated as the dependent variable. An ANOVA was used to detect any significant differences.

Hypothesis 6 Hypothesis 6 was that men and women would use significantly different conflict resolution strategies depending on the area of conflict. The analysis for this hypothesis did not treat men and women independently. Gender was treated as the independent variable while conflict resolution satisfaction was treated as a dependent variable. A matched Hotellings t-test was then conducted to determine any significant differences between men and women.

Hypothesis 7 Hypothesis 7 was that spouses would have significantly different levels of conflict resolution satisfaction depending on conflict outcome. The independent variable was conflict outcome while the dependent variable was the level of conflict resolution satisfaction. A repeated ANOVA was used to detect any significant differences.

Hypothesis 8 Hypothesis 8 was that spouses that use problems solving strategies such as validation and contracting would have significantly more conflict resolution

satisfaction than those who use competition, avoidance, or yielding. The independent variable in this analysis was the conflict resolution strategy while the dependent variable was conflict resolution satisfaction. An ANOVA was then performed.

Summary

This study consisted of 60 couples recruited by the principle researcher and a team of graduate students. Couples were asked to respond to a marital satisfaction inventory as well as a questionnaire assessing conflict area, conflict resolution strategies, conflict process satisfaction and outcome satisfaction. All methods were approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee at Texas Woman's University before the questionnaires were distributed to potential respondents. The series of hypotheses put forth were analyzed and a report is presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Following the data collection, analyses were performed to test the hypotheses. This chapter presents the results of these analyses in addition to a description of the demographic variables. Various statistical tests were used depending on the hypotheses.

Description of the Sample

The sample consisted of 60 couples. A table of the demographics is presented below (Table 2). These couples ranged in age from 21 to 64. The mean age was 38.02 years. Twenty respondents (16.7%) who ranged in age from 21 to 30, 52 (43.3%) ranged from 31 to 40, 44 (36.7%) ranged from 41 to 50, and 4 respondents (3.3%) were over 50.

Couples were married from 1 to 27 years as of their last anniversary. The mean number of years that couples were married was 12.48 years. Twenty-two respondents (18.3%) reported being married for 1 to 5 years, 41 (34.2%) reported being married for 6 to 10 years, 13 (10.8%) reported being married for 11-15 years, 16 (13.4%) reported being married for 16 to 20 years, 18 (15%) reported being married for 21-25 years, and 10 (8.3%) reported being married for over 25 years. One couple reported being married for a different number of years with one spouse reporting having been married for 10 years and the other spouse reported having been married for 11 years.

Most of the respondents were in their first marriage. Only thirteen individuals (10.8%) reported that this was not their first marriage. There were 107 respondents (89.2%) who were in their first marriage, 11 (9.2%) were in their second marriage, and 2 respondents (1.7%) who were in their third marriage.

The majority of the sample was well educated. Only 3 respondents (2.5%) reported having 12 or fewer years of school. Most of the sample (84.2%) had at least a bachelor's degree. Forty-one respondents (34.2%) had at least a master's degree.

Most of this sample had a high income level. The majority of respondents (68.4%) made over sixty thousand dollars of gross income per year. Only two respondents (1.7%) reported making twenty thousand dollars or less per year, and 32 respondents (28.1%) reported making over one hundred thousand dollars per year.

This sample consisted mostly of Caucasians. There were 105 Caucasian respondents (87.5%), 2 African American respondents (1.7%), 6 Hispanic respondents (5.0%), and 8 Asian respondents (5.8%). Nine of the marriages (7.5%) were cross-racial.

One of the criteria for the study was having at least one child 18 years of age or younger living in the household. The majority of this sample had three or fewer children (93.3%). The number of children at home ranged from 1 to 6. The mean number of children for this sample was 1.98. The mode of this sample was 1 child (40.0%) closely followed by 2 children (35.0%). The sex difference of the children was not great. The mean number of male children was 1.13 while the mean number of female children was .83.

There was little variation of religion among the respondents. Christianity was the dominant religion in this study with 116 of the respondents (96.7%) listing this as their religion. Four respondents (3.3%) reported Hinduism as their religion. No other religions were represented by this sample.

The religious affiliation of the Christians was diverse. Forty-one respondents (34.2%) listed Church of Christ, 23 (19.2%) listed Catholicism, 12 (10.0%) reported being Baptist, 12 (10.0%) reported being Methodist, 5 (4.2%) reported being affiliated with Disciples of Christ, there were 2 Lutherans (1.7%), 2 were Seventh Day Adventists (1.7%), and 18 (15.0%) were Non-denominational. One of the Christians (.8%) did not respond to the question. Among the Hindi, 1 (.8%) reported being affiliated with the Mandwa sect, while the other 3 (2.5%) did not respond to the religious affiliation question.

Most of the sample reported attending worship services on a regular and frequent basis. The mean for attending worship services was 5.75 times per month. One hundred, eight of the respondents (80.0%) reported attending worship services 4 or more times per month. Twenty-nine of these respondents (24.2 % of the sample) reported attending worship services 8 times or more per month. Thirteen of the respondents (10.8%) reported attending worship services 12 or more times per month.

This was a sample as a whole were highly satisfied with their marriages. One hundred, seven (81.7%) scored in the very satisfied to extremely satisfied range on the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. Only one respondent (.8%) was classified as

somewhat dissatisfied. All other respondents (99.2%) scored themselves as being satisfied or more than satisfied with their marriages.

Table 2
Demographic Description of the Sample

	N	Percent of Sample
<u>Age</u>		
21-30	52	43.0
31-40	52	43.3
41-50	44	36.7
Over 50	4	3.3
<u>Length of marriage</u>		
1-5 years	22	18.3
6-10	41	34.2
11-15	13	10.8
16-20	16	13.4
21-25	18	15.0
Over 25	10	8.3
<u>Number of marriages</u>		
1	107	89.2
2	11	9.2
3	2	1.7
<u>Education level</u>		
12 or less years	3	2.5
Bachelor's degree	101	84.2
Master's degree or >	41	34.2
<u>Race</u>		
Caucasian	105	87.5
African American	2	1.7
Hispanic	6	5.0
Asian	8	5.8

Tests of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 was that spouses who exhibited a high level of conflict resolution satisfaction would have a higher level of marital satisfaction than spouses who exhibited a low level of conflict resolution satisfaction. Respondents were categorized as having a high level of conflict resolution satisfaction if they scored a 1, 2, or 3 on the Likert scale measuring this variable. Respondents were classified as having a low level of conflict resolution satisfaction if they scored a 5, 6, or 7 on the scale. Respondents scoring a 4 on this scale were dropped from the analyses. A series of ANOVAs were used to perform the analyses. The independent variables for each ANOVA were gender and conflict resolution satisfaction level. The dependent variable for each ANOVA was marital satisfaction level. An ANOVA was performed for each of the 16 areas of conflict. The analyses treated males and females independently. The results showed that for the areas of finance, religion, and time spent together, there was a significant effect for gender, conflict resolution satisfaction, and the interaction of gender and conflict resolution satisfaction on marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was significantly lower for subjects with a low level of conflict resolution than those with a high level of conflict resolution ($p < .05$), men had a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction than women ($p < .05$), and scoring low on conflict resolution satisfaction had a larger impact on marital satisfaction for women than it did for men ($p < .05$). However, in the areas of

philosophy of life, goals, leisure, tasks, and sex, there were significant effects for gender and conflict resolution satisfaction, but no significant interaction between gender and conflict resolution satisfaction. In these areas men had significantly higher marital satisfaction than women ($p < .05$), and there was a significant positive effect of conflict resolution satisfaction on marital satisfaction ($p < .05$). For the areas of parents and in-laws, decision making, and affect, only conflict resolution had a significant effect on marital satisfaction ($p < .05$). Again, a high level of conflict resolution resulted in a high level of marital satisfaction. For the area of friends, there was a marginally significant finding of an interaction between gender and conflict resolution satisfaction on marital satisfaction ($p = .059$). A summary of the ANOVAs can be found in Table 3. See Table 4 for means.

The results do support the hypothesis that spouses who exhibit a high level of conflict resolution will have a higher level of marital satisfaction than spouses who exhibit a low level of conflict resolution satisfaction. However, in the areas of finance, religion, and time spent together, the impact of low conflict resolution satisfaction for women is more important for marital satisfaction than the impact of high conflict resolution satisfaction.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance of Marital Satisfaction by Conflict Resolution Satisfaction (CRS) and Gender

Conflict Area	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob. \leq
<u>Finance</u>					
Gender	1	65.96	65.96	20.31	0.001*
CRS	1	67.63	67.63	20.82	0.001*
Gender by CRS	1	59.10	59.10	18.19	0.001*
<u>Conventionality</u>					
Gender	1	7.57	7.57	1.73	0.191
CRS	1	3.13	3.13	0.71	0.400
Gender by CRS	1	0.62	0.62	0.14	0.708
<u>Philosophy</u>					
Gender	1	22.58	22.58	5.41	0.022*
CRS	1	16.72	16.72	4.01	0.048*
Gender by CRS	1	10.98	10.98	2.63	0.108
<u>Parents/in-laws</u>					
Gender	1	10.52	10.52	2.61	0.109
CRS	1	25.04	25.04	6.21	0.014*
Gender by CRS	1	0.91	0.91	0.22	0.636
<u>Goals</u>					
Gender	1	20.57	20.57	5.53	0.020*
CRS	1	70.46	70.46	18.92	0.001*
Gender by CRS	1	10.87	10.87	2.92	0.090
<u>Recreation</u>					
Gender	1	5.52	5.52	1.57	0.213
CRS	1	10.28	10.28	2.92	0.090
Gender by CRS	1	0.62	0.62	0.18	0.675

Table 3 (continued)

Conflict Area	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob. \leq
<u>Religion</u>					
Gender	1	36.52	36.52	9.07	0.003*
CRS	1	20.28	20.28	5.03	0.027*
Gender by CRS	1	25.39	25.39	6.31	0.013*
<u>Affection</u>					
Gender	1	5.49	5.49	1.47	0.228
CRS	1	22.70	22.70	14.94	0.001*
Gender by CRS	1	1.80	1.80	0.48	0.489
<u>Sex</u>					
Gender	1	21.24	21.24	6.47	0.012*
CRS	1	128.17	128.17	39.06	0.001*
Gender by CRS	1	7.48	7.48	2.28	0.134
<u>Friends</u>					
Gender	1	2.39	2.39	0.57	0.452
CRS	1	0.72	0.72	0.17	0.679
Gender by CRS	1	15.28	15.28	3.64	0.059
<u>Leisure</u>					
Gender	1	16.23	16.23	4.03	0.047*
CRS	1	34.18	34.18	8.48	0.004*
Gender by CRS	1	5.74	5.74	1.42	0.235
<u>Tasks</u>					
Gender	1	22.41	22.41	5.33	0.023*
CRS	1	24.62	24.62	5.86	0.017*
Gender by CRS	1	5.25	5.25	1.25	0.266
<u>Decisions</u>					
Gender	1	9.92	9.92	2.55	0.113
CRS	1	42.31	42.31	10.86	0.001*
Gender by CRS	1	3.12	3.12	0.80	0.373

Table 3 (continued)

Conflict Area	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob. \leq
<u>Time</u>					
Gender	1	28.15	28.15	8.08	0.005*
CRS	1	90.30	90.30	25.93	0.001*
Gender by CRS	1	17.29	17.29	4.97	0.028*
<u>Career</u>					
Gender	1	12.12	12.12	2.78	0.098
CRS	1	1.75	1.75	0.40	0.527
Gender by CRS	1	5.01	5.01	1.15	0.286
<u>Childrearing</u>					
Gender	1	3.06	3.06	0.68	0.412
CRS	1	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.982
Gender by CRS	1	0.30	0.30	0.07	0.796

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ level

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was that women would have lower levels of conflict resolution satisfaction than would men. A t-test was used to test this hypothesis. Conflict resolution satisfaction for each of the 16 areas as well as the average of conflict resolution satisfaction was treated as the dependent variable while gender was treated as the independent variable. The mean for conflict resolution across all 16 areas of conflict was 2.26 for men and 2.22 for women. Because a lower number on the scale equals a greater level of conflict resolution satisfaction, these overall means showed that women had a slightly greater amount of conflict resolution satisfaction than men. The men had

slightly higher but not significantly different levels of conflict resolution satisfaction than women for the areas of conventionality, parents/in-laws, recreation, affection, leisure, tasks, decision-making, and time spent together. The women had slightly higher but not significant levels of conflict resolution satisfaction for the areas of finance, philosophy of life, goals, religion, sex, friends, career, and children. The t-test showed that men and women did not significantly differ on their levels of conflict resolution satisfaction.

There were no significant results for any of the 16 areas of conflict resolution satisfaction or for overall conflict resolution satisfaction. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

The means for conflict resolution satisfaction for men and women are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Conflict Resolution Satisfaction by Gender (lower mean= higher CRS)

Variable	N	Mean	t-value	Prob.
<u>Finance</u>				
Males	60	2.317	0.20	0.842
Females	60	2.267	0.20	0.842
<u>Conventionality</u>				
Males	58	2.310	0.54	0.587
Females	59	2.441	0.54	0.587
<u>Philosophy</u>				
Males	59	2.017	1.28	0.202
Females	59	1.780	1.28	0.202

Table 4 (continued)

Variable	N	Mean	t-value	Prob.
<u>Parents/in-laws</u>				
Males	60	2.427	0.07	0.943
Females	60	2.433	0.07	0.943
<u>Recreation</u>				
Males	59	2.390	0.07	0.941
Females	59	2.407	0.07	0.941
<u>Religion</u>				
Males	60	1.900	0.01	0.993
Females	59	1.898	0.01	0.993
<u>Affect</u>				
Males	59	2.475	0.10	0.921
Females	60	2.500	0.10	0.921
<u>Sex</u>				
Males	60	2.467	0.50	0.620
Females	60	2.333	0.50	0.620
<u>Friends</u>				
Males	59	2.407	1.82	0.072
Females	59	2.017	1.82	0.072
<u>Leisure</u>				
Males	60	2.333	0.17	0.863
Females	59	2.373	0.17	0.863
<u>Tasks</u>				
Males	59	2.593	0.54	0.592
Females	59	2.729	0.54	0.592
<u>Decisions</u>				
Males	60	1.917	0.08	0.934
Females	60	1.933	0.08	0.934
<u>Time</u>				
Males	60	2.267	0.15	0.880
Females	60	2.300	0.15	0.880

Table 4 (continued)

Variable	N	Mean	t-value	Prob.
<u>Career</u>				
Males	59	2.017	0.36	0.718
Females	59	1.949	0.36	0.718

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ level

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated that men and women would use significantly different strategies to resolve conflict within their marriages. A MANOVA was performed to test this hypothesis. The areas of conflict and gender were treated as the independent variables while conflict resolution strategies were treated as the dependent variable. The results showed that when men and women were evaluated together, there was a significant difference among the conflict strategies that they used across different areas of conflict, $F(15, 1725) = 4.57, p \leq .001$. There was not a significant gender interaction. When the genders were evaluated separately, the previous findings held true. There was a difference in conflict resolution strategies across areas of conflict for men, $F(15, 855) = 3.24, p \leq .001$, and for women, $F(15, 870) = 2.94, p \leq .001$. Thus, both men and women did use different strategies to resolve conflict within their marriages, but the strategies selected to resolve conflict did not vary by gender.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 said that men and women would rate different areas of conflict as having significantly different levels of importance in their relationships. A MANOVA was performed to test this hypothesis. The areas of conflict and gender were treated as the independent variables while level of importance for each of the 16 areas was treated as the dependent variable. The first MANOVA analyzed men and women together while testing for a gender interaction. The results showed that men and women do rate different areas of conflict as having different levels of importance in their relationships, $F(16,1824) = 35.71, p \leq .001$. There was no significant gender interaction, meaning that men and women did not vary significantly from one another in the levels of importance that they placed on the various areas of conflict. The analyses were then performed separately for men and women. The results were the same showing that men place different levels of importance on different areas of conflict, $F(16,912) = 20.16, p \leq .001$ and women place different levels of importance on different areas of conflict, $F(16,912) = 16.88, p \leq .001$. There were no means for importance higher than 3.5 for any of the areas. This means that the respondents viewed all the areas of conflict as being at least somewhat important. The top three areas for men were childrearing, religion, and decision-making. The highest level of importance was placed on childrearing while the lowest of the 16 areas was conventionality. The top three areas for women were childrearing, religion, and goals and decision-making (tied). The highest level of

importance was placed on childrearing while the lowest level of importance was placed on recreation closely followed by conventionality. The levels of importance for each of the 16 areas of conflict according to gender can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Levels of Importance Placed on Conflict Areas (low mean = high importance)

	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
<u>Finance</u>			
Males	2.931	1.566	58
Females	2.966	1.389	58
<u>Conventionality</u>			
Males	3.241	1.455	58
Females	3.448	1.391	58
<u>Philosophy</u>			
Males	2.276	1.056	58
Females	2.552	1.635	58
<u>Parents/in-laws</u>			
Males	2.810	1.162	58
Females	2.724	1.472	58
<u>Goals</u>			
Males	2.086	1.144	58
Females	2.172	1.378	58
<u>Recreation</u>			
Males	3.069	1.241	58
Females	3.500	1.547	58
<u>Religion</u>			
Males	1.741	0.928	58
Females	2.069	1.473	58
<u>Affection</u>			
Males	2.138	0.926	58
Females	2.638	1.553	58

Table 5 (continued)

	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
<u>Sex</u>			
Males	2.017	0.946	58
Females	2.483	1.287	58
<u>Friends</u>			
Males	2.724	1.022	58
Females	2.483	1.287	58
<u>Leisure</u>			
Males	2.862	1.099	58
Females	3.310	1.524	58
<u>Tasks</u>			
Males	2.776	0.879	58
Females	3.241	1.144	58
<u>Decisions</u>			
Males	1.845	0.875	58
Females	2.172	1.440	58
<u>Time</u>			
Males	1.931	1.024	58
Females	2.241	1.368	58
<u>Career</u>			
Males	1.966	0.955	58
Females	2.500	1.430	58
<u>Childrearing</u>			
Males	1.603	0.815	58
Females	1.828	1.126	58

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 was that men and women would have different levels of conflict resolution satisfaction depending on the conflict resolution strategy and the importance of the area of conflict. A pretest was used to assess whether or not there were gender differences for these variables. There were no significant differences. Therefore an ANOVA was performed without using gender as a variable. Conflict resolution satisfaction was treated as the dependent variable while conflict strategy and importance of area were treated as the independent variables.

The results of the ANOVA showed that conflict resolution strategy and importance of the conflict area did have an interactive effect on conflict resolution satisfaction, $F(1,30) = 15.74, p \leq .001$. When conflict area was important, conflict resolution satisfaction was high only when conflict resolution strategies included more problem-solving and competitive strategies. When conflict area was unimportant, conflict resolution satisfaction was not impacted when other conflict resolution strategies were used such as yielding or avoidance. Therefore, when a strategy other than problem solving was used, there was a decrease in conflict resolution satisfaction, but it was greater if conflict area had a high level of importance.

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 declared that men and women would use significantly different conflict resolution strategies within the areas of conflict. Spouses were evaluated together rather than treating men and women independently as in Hypothesis 3. A

matched Hotellings t-test was performed using gender as the independent variable and the conflict resolution strategies as the dependent variables. The results showed that men and women do vary their conflict resolution strategies across the conflict areas as in the conclusion for Hypothesis 3, $t^2 = 2.35$, $df = 15$, $p = .003$; however, the wives did not differ from their husbands in the strategy that used to resolve conflict in various areas. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

Hypothesis 7

Hypothesis 7 stated that spouses would have significantly different levels of conflict resolution satisfaction depending on conflict outcome. A repeated ANOVA was performed using gender and conflict outcome as the independent variables and conflict resolution satisfaction as the dependent variable. There was a highly significant effect for conflict outcome on conflict resolution satisfaction for all conflict areas ($p \leq .001$). Therefore, individuals do have different levels of conflict resolution depending on the outcome of the conflict. A post hoc test was conducted to determine which outcomes had the significant effect on conflict resolution satisfaction for each conflict area. For the areas of finance, $F(3,112) = 15.82$, philosophy of life, $F(2,111) = 18.21$, affect, $F(3,111) = 17.99$, sex, $F(3,112) = 32.73$, friends, $F(3,110) = 22.40$, leisure, $F(3,110) = 18.24$, tasks, $F(3,110) = 18.12$, time, $F(3,112) = 20.58$, and childrearing, $F(3,110) = 25.55$, “favorable to spouse” and “unresolved” were significantly lower in conflict resolution satisfaction than the outcome of “favorable to both”. For the areas of conventionality, $F(3,108) = 16.65$, ways of dealing with parents/in-laws, $F(3,112) = 28.33$, goals, $F(3,111) = 20.63$,

recreation, $F(3,109) = 18.88$, sex, $F(3,112) = 32.73$, time, $F(3,112) = 20.58$, career, $F(3,110) = 11.19$, and childrearing, $F(3,110) = 25.55$, “unresolved” was significantly lower than the other outcomes. For the area of religion, $F(3,111) = 14.41$, the outcome of “unresolved” was significantly lower than the outcomes of “favorable to self” or “favorable to spouse”. For the area of decision-making, $F(2,115) = 16.43$, the outcome of “favorable to spouse” was significantly lower in conflict resolution satisfaction than the outcome of “favorable to both”. For the area of parents/in-laws, $F(3,112) = 28.33$, the outcome of “unresolved” was significantly lower than the outcome of “favorable to spouse”. For the area of goals, $F(3,111) = 20.63$, the outcome of “favorable to self” was lower than the outcome of “favorable to both spouses”. For the areas of friends, $F(3,110) = 22.40$ and tasks, $F(3,110) = 18.12$, “unresolved” and “favorable to spouse” resulted in significantly lower amounts of conflict resolution satisfaction than the outcome of “favorable to self”. The probability level for all significant post hoc tests was .001. See Table 4 for means of conflict resolution satisfaction by gender.

There was a significant effect for gender in the conflict areas of goals, $F(1,111) = 4.74$, $p = .032$, leisure, $F(1,110) = 4.19$, $p = .043$, and decision-making, $F(1,115) = 5.39$, $p = .022$. Males and females differed on conflict resolution satisfaction in these areas. Females had a higher level of conflict resolution satisfaction for the area of goals, while males had a higher level of conflict resolution satisfaction for the areas of leisure and decision-making.

A significant interaction effect of gender and outcome on conflict resolution was found for some of the conflict areas. Significant interactions were found for the areas of finance, $F(2,112) = 3.62$, $p = .030$, parents/in-laws, $F(3,112) = 2.69$, $p = .050$, goals, $F(3,111) = 3.97$, $p = .010$, leisure, $F(3,110) = 3.17$, $p = .027$, and decision-making, $F(1,115) = 4.89$, $p = .024$. For the area of finance, when the outcome was “favorable to spouse”, conflict resolution satisfaction increased for men but decreased for women when compared to the outcome of “favorable to both spouses”. For the area of ways of dealing with parents/in-laws, the conflict resolution satisfaction of men decreased but stayed the same for women in the outcome of “favorable to spouse” when compared to an outcome of “favorable to both spouses”. For the areas of goals, leisure, and decision-making conflict resolution satisfaction was lowered much more for women than for men when the outcome was “favorable to spouse” when compared to an outcome of “favorable to both spouses”.

Hypothesis 8

Hypothesis 8 held that spouses who used problem solving strategies such as validation and contracting would have significantly more conflict resolution satisfaction than those who used competition, avoidance, or yielding. A repeated ANOVA was performed to test this hypothesis. The problem solving strategy was recoded as a 1 while all other strategies were recoded as a 2. Conflict resolution strategy and gender were then treated as the independent variables while conflict resolution satisfaction was treated as

the dependent variable. Again, a greater mean equaled a lower level of conflict resolution satisfaction.

The results supported the hypothesis and showed some interactions for some of the areas of conflict. For the areas of finance, conventionality, parents/in-laws, goals, recreation, affect, friends, leisure, tasks, decision-making, career, and childrearing, there was a highly significant effect for conflict resolution satisfaction ($p \leq .001$). Using problem solving to resolve conflicts produced a greater level of conflict resolution satisfaction than did using competition, avoidance, or yielding to resolve the conflict. There were no significant gender differences for these findings and no significant interaction effect of gender and conflict resolution strategy on conflict resolution satisfaction for these areas of conflict.

For the area of philosophy of life, there was a significant finding of conflict strategy ($p \leq .001$) on conflict resolution satisfaction as well as a significant interaction. Problem solving resulted in a higher level of conflict satisfaction in this area. However, using competition, avoidance, or yielding to resolve conflict in this area resulted in a lower level of conflict resolution satisfaction for women than it did for men. However, gender overall did not have an effect on the level of conflict resolution satisfaction.

For the areas of time and religion, there was a significant finding for gender ($p < .05$), for conflict strategy ($p < .05$), and for the interaction of gender and conflict strategy ($p < .05$). In these areas, men had a higher level of conflict resolution satisfaction, problem solving strategies resulted in a higher level of conflict resolution satisfaction

than for women, and women were affected more on conflict resolution satisfaction when they used competition, avoidance, or yielding than were men. Table 6 provides the results of the ANOVA. See Table 4 for means of conflict resolution satisfaction by gender.

Table 6
Analysis of Variance of Conflict Resolution Satisfaction (CRS) by Strategy and Gender

Conflict Area	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob. \leq
<u>Finance</u>					
Gender	1	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.803
Strategy	1	70.80	70.80	54.21	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	0.42	0.42	0.32	0.574
<u>Conventionality</u>					
Gender	1	1.27	1.27	1.16	0.284
Strategy	1	66.49	66.49	60.68	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	2.05	2.05	1.87	0.174
<u>Philosophy</u>					
Gender	1	2.44	2.44	3.64	0.059
Strategy	1	38.23	38.23	57.00	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	3.62	3.62	5.40	0.022*
<u>Parents/in-laws</u>					
Gender	1	0.11	0.11	0.13	0.715
Strategy	1	88.20	88.20	103.56	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	1.77	1.77	2.08	0.152
<u>Goals</u>					
Gender	1	0.64	0.64	0.73	0.396
Strategy	1	31.27	31.27	35.39	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	1.56	1.56	1.76	0.187

Table 6 (continued)

Conflict Area	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob. \leq
<u>Recreation</u>					
Gender	1	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.843
Strategy	1	61.82	61.82	59.75	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.600
<u>Religion</u>					
Gender	1	4.90	4.90	5.52	0.020*
Strategy	1	20.62	20.62	23.26	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	7.97	7.97	9.00	0.003
<u>Affection</u>					
Gender	1	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.831
Strategy	1	79.22	79.22	62.80	0.00
Gender by Strategy	1	0.60	0.60	0.47	0.491
<u>Sex</u>					
Gender	1	0.20	0.20	0.15	0.701
Strategy	1	88.08	88.08	62.82	0.00
Gender by Strategy	1	1.29	1.29	0.92	0.341
<u>Friends</u>					
Gender	1	2.95	2.95	3.56	0.061
Strategy	1	62.64	62.64	75.51	0.00
Gender by Strategy	1	0.49	0.49	0.59	0.441
<u>Leisure</u>					
Gender	1	1.63	1.63	1.49	0.221
Strategy	1	54.81	54.81	50.34	0.00
Gender by Strategy	1	2.03	2.03	1.86	0.175
<u>Tasks</u>					
Gender	1	0.18	0.18	0.16	0.689
Strategy	1	92.81	92.81	84.66	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.889

Table 6 (continued)

Conflict Area	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob. \leq
<u>Decisions</u>					
Gender	1	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.867
Strategy	1	31.72	31.72	33.30	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.878
<u>Time</u>					
Gender	1	4.05	4.05	4.90	0.029*
Strategy	1	76.27	76.27	92.28	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	3.77	3.77	4.56	0.035*
<u>Career</u>					
Gender	1	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.907
Strategy	1	7.55	1.00	7.55	0.007*
Gender by Strategy	1	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.907
<u>Childrearing</u>					
Gender	1	0.47	0.47	0.41	0.525
Strategy	1	49.86	49.86	43.50	0.001*
Gender by Strategy	1	0.87	0.87	0.76	0.386

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ level

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between conflict areas, conflict strategies, conflict resolution satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and conflict outcome. This chapter presented the results of the study. Support was found for all hypotheses except for Hypotheses 2 and 6. Significant findings were reported for Hypotheses 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8. A high level of conflict resolution satisfaction resulted in

a high level of marital satisfaction (Hypothesis 1). Men and women were found to vary their conflict resolution strategies across the 16 areas of conflict (Hypothesis 3). Men and women were rated different areas of conflict as having different levels of importance (Hypothesis 4). Importance of the area of conflict and the conflict resolution strategies used by spouses affected conflict resolution satisfaction (Hypothesis 6). The outcome of conflict had a significant effect on conflict resolution satisfaction for all 16 areas of conflict (Hypothesis 7). Using problem solving strategies resulted in greater conflict resolution satisfaction than any other conflict strategy (Hypothesis 8).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This research study examined conflict among satisfied couples. Conflict strategies, importance of various conflict areas to the subjects, outcome of conflict, and satisfaction with the way conflict was resolved across 16 different areas of conflict was examined in an attempt to better understand various aspects of conflict and the effect on marital satisfaction. The areas of conflict that were examined were: handling family finance, conventionality (correct or proper behavior), philosophy of life, ways of dealing with parents/in-laws, goals, matters of recreation, religious matters, demonstration of affection, sexual relations, friends, leisure time interests and activities, household tasks, making major decisions, amount of time spent together, career decisions, and childrearing. Areas of conflict were taken from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and childrearing was added as an additional area due to other research which documented it as being an important topic of marital conflict (Belsky & Pensky, 1998; Douglass & Douglass, 1995; Goldberg, 1987; Mead et al., 1962; Olson et al., 1982; Spanier, 1976; Storaasli & Markman, 1990).

A convenience sample of 60 couples living primarily in North Texas participated in this study. The subjects had been married for at least one year and had at least one

child 18 years old or younger in the home. Subjects completed an original questionnaire designed by the researcher.

This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the findings. Limitations and implications of the findings for marriage and family therapists (MFTs) are discussed, and further research recommendations are given.

Summary of Findings

The sample ranged in age from 21 to 64. The average number of years that the couples had been married was 12.48 years. The couples had to have at least one child 18 years of age or younger living at home. The average number of children the couples had was 1.98. Almost all the couples were Caucasian Christians who attended worship services on a regular basis.

There were 8 hypotheses presented and tested. The analyses and results are presented in Appendix D. Hypothesis 1 was supported when a high level of conflict resolution satisfaction resulted in a high level of marital satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 was not supported when no significant differences in the level of conflict resolution satisfaction for men and women were found. Hypothesis 3 was supported when the analysis showed that individuals do vary their conflict resolution strategies across different areas of conflict. A gender difference was not found for Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 4 was that men and women would rate different areas of conflict as having different levels of importance. This hypothesis was supported in that subjects did vary in

level of importance across conflict areas. There were no significant gender differences in the way that the subjects ranked different conflict areas. Hypothesis 5 was supported when the analyses showed that conflict resolution satisfaction was influenced by the importance of the area of conflict in combination with the conflict resolution strategy employed. Hypothesis 6 was not supported. Spouses were evaluated in pairs and showed that husbands and wives do not use significantly different strategies within the same conflict area. Hypothesis 7 was supported when the results showed that outcome of conflict does have a significant effect on conflict resolution satisfaction for every area of conflict studied. The results of the analyses showed support for Hypothesis 8. Spouses that used problem solving strategies were found to have greater conflict resolution satisfaction than spouses who used other conflict resolution strategies.

Discussion

This study was based on Gottman's Balance Theory of Marriage (1993). According to this theory, couples who balance negative affect with at least five demonstrations of positive affect will have a satisfied marriage. This study provides support for this theory. Couples who used problem solving strategies more than other conflict resolution strategies had higher levels of marital satisfaction (Hypothesis 8). However, these couples who were satisfied in their marriages did not use problem solving strategies to the exclusion of all other strategies. Support found for Hypothesis 3 showed that couples use a variety of conflict resolution strategies. Thus, it appears that couples in

this sample used different conflict resolution strategies, but they primarily used problem solving strategies such as validation and contracting. Support for Gottman's theory was also found in the results of Hypothesis 1. Couples who had a greater level of conflict resolution satisfaction (positive emotion) concerning the conflict resolution strategies that they used had a higher level of marital satisfaction than those who were dissatisfied with the way they resolved conflict (negative emotion). The Balance Theory of Marriage was supported for this study and this sample.

There was a lack of support found for Hypothesis 2. Significant gender differences were not found in the level of conflict resolution satisfaction for these couples. The couples in this sample were people who regularly attended worship services. It is likely that the majority of these couples were traditional couples. Traditional couples may have fewer gender differences in their conflict resolution satisfaction than nontraditional couples. Both spouses in traditional marriages may be more satisfied with their spouses using yielding or avoiding in some areas of conflict than spouses in nontraditional marriages. This is consistent with Fitzpatrick's (1988) findings that traditional couples will use more avoidance and yielding to resolve conflict than nontraditional couples. Gender role literature has linked a lessening of traditional gender role attitudes with an increase of disagreements over role expectations within the marriage (Rogers & Amato, 1997). It may be that the way that these differing expectations are resolved leads to a greater amount of gender differences in conflict resolution satisfaction for nontraditional couples.

Although significant gender differences were not found for Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5,6, or 7, there were some significant gender differences found in the other two hypotheses. Results for Hypothesis 1 showed a significant gender difference in marital satisfaction in all areas of conflict except ways of dealing with parents and in-laws, decision-making, and affect. Men were shown to have significantly more marital satisfaction than women. Another gender difference that was found for Hypothesis 1 was that low conflict resolution satisfaction in the areas of finance, religion, and amount of time spent together, was shown to result in lower marital satisfaction for women but not for men. Results for Hypothesis 3 indicated that there were no significant gender differences for the strategies that were employed in conflict resolution for the various areas of conflict. There were also no gender differences found for Hypothesis 4. Men and women did not vary significantly from one another in the levels of importance that they placed on the various areas of conflict. The top three areas of conflict according to level of importance for both genders included childrearing, religion, and decision-making. A lack of gender difference in conflict areas as well as the order of importance was also found by Mitchell et. al. (1962). Eells and O'Flaherty (1996) also found that men and women identified the same conflict areas as being the most important although they enumerated the top ten slightly differently. Husbands and wives appear to agree on the areas in which conflict occurs as well as the importance of these areas of conflict in their relationships. There were also no significant gender differences found for Hypothesis 7. The level of conflict resolution satisfaction was not found to vary between

the genders nor was there a significant interaction effect between gender and conflict outcome on conflict resolution satisfaction. It appears that conflict resolution satisfaction is not more important for one gender than for another and that conflict outcome does not affect conflict resolution satisfaction differently according to gender. A few gender differences were found for Hypothesis 8. In the area of philosophy of life, using conflict resolution strategies other than problem solving was found to result in lower levels of conflict resolution satisfaction for women than it did for men. For the areas of time and religion, men had a significantly higher level of conflict resolution satisfaction, problem solving strategies resulted in a higher level of conflict resolution satisfaction for men than for women, and women were affected more than men on conflict resolution satisfaction when they used strategies other than problem solving to resolve conflict.

There may appear to be a contradiction between the findings for Hypotheses 2 and 8 because the results for Hypotheses 2 did not reveal any significant gender differences in conflict resolution satisfaction, whereas some significant gender differences in conflict resolution satisfaction were found in the results for Hypothesis 8. However, upon further examination, these findings are not contrary to one another. Hypothesis 2 was a comparison of the conflict resolution satisfaction level for men and women across the 16 areas of conflict, whereas Hypothesis 8 was a comparison of the level of conflict resolution satisfaction for men and women based on the strategies that they employed to resolve conflict. Therefore, the means that were compared for these two hypotheses were composed of different variables. For Hypothesis 2, the mean was of

the conflict resolution satisfaction level only, whereas for Hypothesis 8 the mean of the conflict resolution satisfaction for problem solving strategy and the mean of the conflict resolution satisfaction for strategies other than problem solving were compared.

The finding of a significant interaction between gender and strategy on conflict resolution satisfaction in the areas of amount of time spent together and religion for Hypothesis 8 supported one of the findings for Hypothesis 1. The results of Hypothesis 8 showed that women were affected more than men in the areas of time spent together and religion when they used conflict resolution strategies other than a problem solving strategy. Using the conflict resolution strategies of avoidance, yielding, or competition resulted in a lower level of conflict resolution satisfaction for women than it did for men. This is similar to the finding in Hypothesis 1 that for women, lower levels of conflict resolution satisfaction in the areas of finance, religion, and time spent together led to lower levels of marital satisfaction than it did for men. Thus negativity in the areas of time spent together and religion has a greater deleterious affect on the conflict resolution satisfaction level and, therefore, on the marital satisfaction level for women than it does for men. Gilligan's (1982) work in developmental theory has shown that men strengthen their gender identity through separation processes whereas women strengthen their gender identity through intimacy and affiliation. The areas of time spent together as well as religion are affiliative in nature. It follows that not using a problem solving conflict resolution strategy for these areas would result in lower conflict resolution satisfaction for

women. Whereas handling conflict in less direct ways for conflict areas affiliative in nature would not lead to less conflict resolution satisfaction for men.

Marital satisfaction overall was significantly greater for men than for women. The results of lower marital satisfaction for women in a highly religious sample were also obtained by Schumm, Bollman, and Jurich (1997). This study also used the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. Another study by Schumm, Webb, and Bollman (1998) found that women had less marital satisfaction than men when marital satisfaction was measured by a single item. A possible explanation of lower marital satisfaction for women could be that women may have greater, unmet expectations for their spouses and relationships. Past studies have indicated that women tend to monitor their marriages more closely than their husbands do and that women are more sensitive to the intimate climate of their relationships (Gottman, 1994; Larson et al., 1998). This study found that the marital satisfaction of women suffered more than that of men when they had lower conflict resolution satisfaction with the strategy that was used. Not only are negative processes more harmful than positive processes are helpful for marital satisfaction as previously found by Gottman, but for the current study this is even truer for women than for men. It is possible that women are more sensitive to interpretations of negative emotions and processes than are their spouses.

As mentioned previously, low conflict resolution satisfaction affected marital satisfaction scores for women more than did high conflict resolution satisfaction in the areas of finance, religion, and amount of time spent together. While religion was one of

the most important areas of conflict for both men and women, finance and amount of time spent together were at the lower end of the spectrum in level of importance for both women and for men. This is in contrast to several other studies in which finance was ranked as one of the top conflict areas (Mitchell et al., 1962; Sternberg & Beier, 1977; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). The religious nature of the sample may account for placing religion much higher in importance than finances. As for the greater impact of low conflict resolution satisfaction on the marital satisfaction scores for women, it may be that women are more sensitive to negative interactions during conflict for these areas.

The analyses revealed a lack of support for Hypothesis 6, which stated that husbands and wives would use significantly different conflict resolution strategies within the same areas of conflict. Other research has pointed to the escalating cycle of demand/withdraw in which husbands tend to withdraw or avoid conflict while the wives pursue with confrontational strategies in an effort to engage their husbands in conflict resolution. Such demand/withdraw patterns have been linked to lower marital satisfaction (Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen 1993; Markman, Silvern, Clements, & Kraft-Hanak, 1993). It follows that such a pattern would be less likely to occur in satisfied marriages such as the ones in the current study.

The overall lack of gender differences found in this study speaks to the similarity of men and women. Conflict resolution strategy, conflict resolution satisfaction, the importance level of the area of conflict, and the outcome of conflict were important indicators of marital satisfaction for both genders. Both men and women displayed the

desire to have conflict resolved, and both men and women labeled the same areas of conflict as having the most importance. While some gender differences were found as discussed above, men and women had more similarity than differences for all variables and the ways in which the variables interacted. The lack of differences found in this study varies from the findings of other marital conflict studies. Other studies have pointed to differences in conflict resolution strategies between the genders. These studies found that wives were more confrontive while their husbands were more likely to avoid conflict (Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brien, 2000; Sagrestano, Heavey, & Christensen, 1998).

This study was based on maritally satisfied couples. A new variable (conflict resolution satisfaction) was explored in relationship to other variables of conflict in marital relationships. It was important to use a maritally satisfied sample to establish a new variable because this may become the model for how the new variable should appear in healthy couples. MFTs will have a better understanding of how to help dissatisfied couple achieve a higher level of satisfaction rather than only knowing the characteristics of conflict resolution satisfaction for dissatisfied couples.

Several findings for conflict resolution satisfaction resulted from this study. Satisfaction with the conflict strategy that was used (conflict resolution satisfaction) affected marital satisfaction. Again, this study found that individuals with a higher level of conflict resolution satisfaction also had a higher level of marital satisfaction. The strategy used to solve conflict was found to be important to conflict resolution satisfaction. The problem solving strategy of resolving conflict was shown to result in

higher levels of conflict resolution satisfaction than other conflict resolution strategies. However, this study showed that these satisfied couples did use other strategies in addition to problem solving. Thus the strategy that a couple used to resolve conflict was not the only factor in determining the level of conflict resolution satisfaction. This is similar to Gottman's (1993) study that linked more than one conflict resolution strategy with healthy couples. He found that stable couples used validation, avoidance, and expressed positive and negative affect. However, the stable couples used more positive and less negative behaviors than unstable couples. Conflict resolution satisfaction for satisfied couples in the current study was impacted by the level of importance placed on the various areas of conflict as well as the outcome of the conflict. Satisfied couples maintained a high level of conflict resolution satisfaction if the strategy that was used resulted in the outcome that they desired in an area that was important to them. The outcome of "unresolved," however, had the greatest negative impact on conflict resolution satisfaction than did any of the other outcomes including "in my spouse's favor." It appears that unresolved conflict itself may have a negative impact on marital satisfaction.

This study focused on the structure as well as the processes of conflict. According to Sagrestano et al. (1998), "the structure of conflict means the conflict of interest between people, that is, the differences between them that create a problem of dilemma for them. The process of conflict means the overt conflictual interaction that takes place between [the spouses]" (p. 292). The structure of conflict was represented in

this study by investigating conflict by the various areas of conflict as well as the outcome. The process of conflict was represented in the variables of conflict resolution strategy, conflict resolution satisfaction, and importance placed on each area of conflict.

Applications for MFTs

One of the purposes of this study was to benefit MFTs by giving them information on how satisfied couples manage their conflict across different domains or areas of marriage. This study showed that couples do vary their conflict resolution strategies across different domains of marriage. MFTs may benefit from knowing that even highly satisfied couples may not use the ideal problem solving strategy for every area of conflict. Rather, conflict resolution satisfaction and marital satisfaction is impacted by the combination of area of conflict, importance of that area to the individuals, the strategy of resolving that conflict, and the outcome as a result of using that particular strategy. Thus, in some situations, using competition, avoidance, or yielding may suit the couple's need in the situation. Therefore, MFTs should be cautious in advocating problem solving strategies in every situation. Due to the highly satisfied nature of the sample in this study, MFTs can assume that variety in conflict resolution strategies may be necessary to resolve conflict across the domains of marriage. MFTs should remember that this study found that the outcome of "unresolved" negatively impacted conflict resolution satisfaction more than any other outcome. This is not surprising when one considers the uncomfortable nature of conflict. For example, the

classic demand/withdraw pattern in which conflict is unresolved has been shown to have deleterious effects on marriage (Heavey et al., 1993; Heavey et al., 1995). Therefore, sometimes it may be more effective for a couple if one spouse is yielding in an area and the other spouse is favored in the outcome than for the conflict to remain unresolved. This builds on Gottman's work that uncovered negative reciprocity during conflict as being detrimental to marital satisfaction rather than the conflict resolution strategy that is utilized by a couple (Gottman, 1993). The outcome that is detrimental to conflict resolution satisfaction is one in which the problem is unresolved and the conflict continues. Earlier in this study it was pointed out that low conflict resolution satisfaction was linked with lower marital satisfaction. Not only can negative reciprocity lead to lower marital satisfaction, but unresolved conflict is also likely to lead to low conflict resolution satisfaction and, therefore, lower marital satisfaction. MFTs should be concerned with preventing negative interactions during conflict resolution as well as helping couples come to a conclusion when dealing with conflict. MFTs should also be wary of seeking template solutions and recognize the uniqueness of the couple in order to help them improve their happiness.

Conclusions

This study explored a new variable in the area of marital conflict. Satisfaction with the conflict resolution strategies was called conflict resolution satisfaction. This variable was found to significantly affect marital satisfaction and in turn was significantly

affected by the area or domains of conflict, the importance of the area of conflict, the conflict resolution strategy, and the outcome of the conflict. Conflict resolution satisfaction was highest when problem solving strategies were used, especially for areas that were important to the spouses. Although high conflict resolution satisfaction was linked to high marital satisfaction and problem solving strategies were linked to high conflict resolution strategies, this does not mean that all conflict should be resolved using problem solving strategies. The sample that was used was very high in marital satisfaction, and these couples did use a variety of strategies across the various domains of conflict. Therefore, it is difficult to say if there are correct ways to resolve conflict, and this should be taken into account when working with maritally satisfied couples.

The importance of investigating conflict resolution satisfaction as a new variable in marital conflict studies is supported by another study that was recently published. In an article by Greeff and deBruyne (2000), satisfaction with conflict management strategy was addressed. There is, however, a large difference in the conceptualization of satisfaction with conflict management and the variable of conflict resolution satisfaction that is addressed by the current study. Conflict resolution satisfaction in the current study was measured by asking respondents how satisfied they are with resolving particular issues using a particular strategy of conflict resolution. Greeff and DeBruyne measured satisfaction with conflict management using the items that make up the conflict resolution scale in the PREPARE inventory. The PREPARE was designed to evaluate relationship strengths and weaknesses in a variety of relationship areas including conflict resolution

(Olson et al., 1982). The questions that make up the conflict resolution subscale do not ask the individuals to rate their satisfaction with the way that they resolve conflict.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should be conducted in order to widen the understanding of marital conflict and conflict resolution satisfaction. One study will not be able to include all suggestions, but a series of studies will help researchers understand conflict variables and their interactions when applied to different populations.

Different cultures should be explored to better understand similarities and differences of conflict among various people. It may be that findings for the variable of conflict resolution satisfaction may vary across cultures as other conflict variables have been found to differ. For example, frequency and strategy of conflict resolution has been found to vary among African Americans when compared to Caucasian and Hispanic couples due to the greater egalitarian nature of the African Americans' relationships (Mackey & O'Brien, 1998).

It would be interesting to investigate how spouses' perceptions of their partners' levels of importance, outcomes, and conflict resolution satisfaction affect the marital satisfaction. It may be that spouses differ on their perceptions of the outcome for a specific conflict area or that couples who differ in their levels of conflict resolution satisfaction for particular areas of conflict have less marital satisfaction than those that have the same conflict resolution satisfaction level.

Outcome satisfaction should be investigated in relation to conflict resolution satisfaction and marital satisfaction. Conflict resolution satisfaction may be more or less important than outcome satisfaction.

Most of the couples in this study had only been married one time. It would be interesting to do a comparison between couples married one time and couples who have been married more than once to see if strategies and satisfaction with using these strategies differ. In addition, couples married more than once who are dissatisfied with their marriages could be compared to couples married more than one time who are satisfied with their marriages. It may be that couples married more than once are satisfied with their marriage because they have learned what conflict resolution strategies to use and how to prioritize the domains of their conflict in order to be content.

This study was quantitative. A qualitative interview process may enrich researchers' understanding of conflict resolution satisfaction and its relationship to other conflict variables and their impact on marital satisfaction level.

In addition to purposive samples, samples that are randomized should be employed in future studies. Such samples will help eliminate researcher bias in sample selection and will provide a means for generalizing to a wider population.

Some of the future research should be conducted with larger samples. More sophisticated statistical analyses such as path analyses could be conducted in research using larger samples in order to investigate causal pathways between conflict variables. One such causal pathway that should be tested is that unresolved conflict causes low

conflict resolution satisfaction, which in turn causes marital satisfaction to be lowered. Unresolved conflict was associated in this study with the lowest levels of conflict resolution satisfaction. Low conflict resolution satisfaction is a negative affect, and unless balanced by five times as much positive affect, marital satisfaction can be expected to suffer, according to the Balance Theory of Marriage (Gottman, 1993).

Future research should also investigate combining personality research with conflict research. It may be that certain personality types may use particular conflict resolution strategies more effectively or be more or less satisfied with using particular conflict resolution strategies than other personality types. Some research of this type has already been conducted and discussed in Chapter 2 (Buss, 1991, Geist & Gilbert, 1996; Newton et al., 1995; Sanders et al., 1991). However, future research should be conducted that examines personality types or traits and more of the same conflict variables that were investigated in this study.

Conflict resolution satisfaction and other conflict variables may vary according to length of marriage. For example, some research indicates that some areas of conflict are more salient depending on the stage of marriage (Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Sternberg & Beier, 1977; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). Research should focus on conflict in various stages of marriage. In addition, comparison studies of the different stages of marriage should be done.

The current study used a sample of couples that were highly satisfied with their marriages. A comparison study between satisfied and dissatisfied couples should be

completed to better understand how conflict variables interact to affect marital satisfaction. For example, conflict areas have compared between satisfied and dissatisfied couples and found to differ little (Mitchell et al., 1962). More comparison studies should be conducted for other conflict resolution variables to determine similarities and differences between satisfied and dissatisfied couples.

This research investigated a new variable of conflict (conflict resolution satisfaction). Future research should continue to investigate possible variables of conflict or study established variables in qualitative ways in order to better understand them and how they interact.

Limitations

Various limitations of this study must be acknowledged, as they may have affected the results. The sample for this study was one of convenience. Because of a lack randomization, the findings cannot be generalized to all married couples with children. In addition, because some of the respondents were acquaintances, particular responses may have been given in an attempt to please the researcher.

This sample was also homogeneous in religion, race, education level, and socioeconomic status. Therefore, the findings can only be generalized to Caucasian, Christian, highly educated, high SES married couples with children. A sample with less homogeneity may have exhibited different conflict strategies, different levels of marital

satisfaction, conflict resolution satisfaction, outcomes, and levels of importance place on the various areas of conflict.

The sample size for this study was 60 couples. A larger sample may have produced different results. Larger samples supply a larger amount of power to detect significant effects of one or more variables on other variables.

This study purposely sampled couples that were satisfied with their marriages; therefore, the findings cannot be applied to clinical couples. Clinical couples may use very different conflict resolution strategies with different outcomes.

When these limitations are taken into account, and the findings are applied to similar populations as the sample, the findings are legitimate and add to the understanding of this topic.

Summary

This study provided an overview of the literature and research on marital conflict in relation to areas of conflict, conflict resolution strategies, marital satisfaction, and theories on which this same research is based. The purpose was to investigate conflict resolution satisfaction as it changed in relation to the area of conflict, the importance of the area of conflict, the conflict resolution strategy that was used, and the outcome of the conflict. The level of marital satisfaction according to the level of conflict resolution satisfaction was also investigated.

The findings revealed that a high level of conflict resolution satisfaction resulted in a high level of marital satisfaction. The conflict resolution strategies varied across the 16 domains of marital conflict that were tested. Husbands and wives were not found to use different conflict resolution strategies within the same areas of conflict. The more important the conflict area was to the spouses, the greater the conflict resolution satisfaction was affected by the conflict resolution strategy that was employed. Husbands in this study did not rate the importance 16 areas of conflict differently from their wives. The outcome of conflict was found to affect the level of conflict resolution satisfaction with the outcome of "unresolved" having the most negative effect. All of these findings showed that the variables in this study do impact one another and are important in future research in the area of marital conflict.

Although much of the research and literature on marital conflict and marital satisfaction is atheoretical, the current study was based on Gottman's Balance Theory of Marriage (1993). The Balance Theory of Marriage explains marital satisfaction as a result of interactions (including conflictual ones) in terms of outweighing negative with positive to increase satisfaction. This theory does not explain how some areas of conflict are more important to resolve using positive interactions than others, nor does it explain how the outcome of conflict impacts the marriage. Perhaps using another theory in conjunction with the Balance Theory of Marriage to explain such variables is the solution. For example, using Equity Theory with the Balance Theory of Marriage can explain how the importance of conflict areas affects the levels of conflict resolution

satisfaction and outcome satisfaction. Viewing the outcome as a reward and conflict as the cost may explain how conflict resolution satisfaction varies according to importance of an area. An individual differences conceptual framework may help explain the gender differences that were found. For example, the finding that using a strategy other than problem solving in the conflict areas of time spent together and religion had a greater negative impact on the level of conflict resolution satisfaction for women than it did for men would be explained by the individual differences framework as being due to women being more affiliative than men. Because religion and time spent together are affiliative in nature, these areas of conflict would be especially important for women to resolve in a way in which there is mutual give and take.

There is a lack of a unifying theory to guide the research of marital conflict (Fincham, 1999). Perhaps the Balance Theory of Marriage could be such a theory with further testing and expansion to include propositions concerning prevention, intervention, and integrating new variables of marital conflict.

Finally, this research was based on a highly religious, maritally satisfied sample. Findings can only be generalized to a similar population. However, this study does provide glimpses into processes that affect marital satisfaction. Such information may help researchers reveal similar processes in other populations. Information about processes that affect marital satisfaction may also help practitioners assist clinical couples in becoming more satisfied with their marriages.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions.

What is your gender? ____ male ____ female

What is your current age as of your last birthday? ____

How many years have you been married to your current spouse as of your last anniversary? ____

Is this your first marriage? ____ yes ____ no

How many times have you been married? ____

How many years of school have you completed? ____

What was your household gross income (before taxes) last year? ____

What is your race (ex. Caucasian, African American, Hispanic)? ____

What is your religion (ex. Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.)? ____

What is your religious affiliation (ex. Methodist, Catholic, Jewish, Baptist, etc.)? ____

How many times per month do you attend worship services? ____

How many children ages 0-18 are currently living in your home? ____

How many of these children are male? ____ List their ages ____

How many of these children are female? ____ List their ages ____

Please circle the numbers corresponding to your answers for each of the following 3 questions.

How satisfied are you with your marriage?

Extremely Dissatisfied	Very Dissatis.	Somewhat Dissatis.	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satis.	Extremely Satis.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How satisfied are you with your spouse?

Extremely Dissatisfied	Very Dissatis.	Somewhat Dissatis.	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satis.	Extremely Satis.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?

Extremely Dissatisfied	Very Dissatis.	Somewhat Dissatis.	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satis.	Extremely Satis.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Assessment of Conflict Resolution Satisfaction

This page contains the questions for the following page. Please answer the questions found on this page for each of the 16 areas located on the next page. Mark your responses on the following page. For example, for the area of finances found on the next page, answer questions a through e found on this page.

- a. How do you typically try to resolve problems in this area of your marriage? Choose one of the following four strategies according to the description given.

A=Avoidance-My spouse and I usually try not to discuss this topic because it will lead to conflict.

Y=Yielding- I usually give in to what my spouse wants so that we will not argue.

P=Problem-solving-My spouse and I try to have a calm discussion about this topic in order to search for solutions.

C=Competition-One person usually tries to get the result they want.

- b. How satisfied are you with resolving these particular problems in this manner? Please write the corresponding number.

Extremely Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Indifferent	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- c. How important is this conflict area to your relationship? Please write the corresponding number.

Extremely Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Indifferent	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- d. What is usually the outcome of this conflict area? Please write the corresponding number to one of the following.

Favorable to self	Favorable to spouse	Favorable to both	Unresolved
1	2	3	4

- e. How satisfied are you with this outcome? Please write the corresponding number

Extremely Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Indifferent	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please use the blanks for each of the 16 areas to respond to questions a through e found on the colored sheet. Think about the way that you typically resolve each type of conflict within your marriage. If you are not currently experiencing a particular type of conflict, think about the way that you resolved it in the past or the way that you would probably solve it if it became a problem.

1. Handling family finances

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

2. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

3. Philosophy of life

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

4. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

5. Aims, goals, and things believed to be important

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

6. Matters of recreation

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

7. Religious matters

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

8. Demonstration of affection

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

9. Sexual relations

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

10. Friends

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

11. Leisure time interests and activities

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

12. Household tasks

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

13. Making major decisions

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

14. Amount of time spent together

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

15. Career decisions

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

16. Childrearing

a. ___ b. ___ c. ___ d. ___ e. ___

Please keep the cover letter and one completed copy of the consent form for yourself. Seal your completed questionnaire (two white pages and colored page) in a white envelope without showing it to your spouse. Place the two sealed white envelopes in the large brown envelope provided along with two signed consent forms (one for each spouse). Thank you for your participation.

Appendix B

Cover Letter

Dear Participant:

The following questionnaire is for a dissertation study of healthy couples. Conflict in unhealthy couples has been studied for many years, but there is a lack of knowledge about how healthy couples resolve their differences. The purpose of this study is to better understand how healthy couples resolve conflict. Hopefully such knowledge can help unhealthy couples have better marriages. The packet should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. By completing this questionnaire, you will be assisting me in completing my dissertation in Family Therapy. Your responses will be kept confidential by separating your signature and any other identifying information from your completed questionnaire packet as soon as it is received. This packet includes two identical questionnaires (one for you and one for your spouse). Please complete the following questionnaire in a location away from your spouse (ex., a separate room). Place one copy of your completed consent form in the large envelope. Keep the other copy of your consent form and this letter for future reference. Place your completed questionnaire in the smaller envelope and seal it. Place both small envelopes containing your completed questionnaire in the larger envelope and seal it.

As thanks for participating in my study, I am including all consent forms from completed questionnaires in a drawing for gift certificates for movie rentals and restaurants. Both spouses must complete the questionnaire in order to qualify for the drawing. Your participation is very important for the completion of my degree, and I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Amy Wristen Pape, Ph.D. Candidate

Appendix C
Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
SUBJECT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Conflict Resolution Satisfaction :
A Study of Satisfied Marriages Across 16 Domains of Marital Conflict.

Amy Pape, M.S. - Principal Investigator 817-403-3011
Frank Thomas, Ph.D. – Project Advisor 940-898-2689

The purpose of this study is to better understand how healthy couples resolve conflict in various areas of their marriages. This study consists of a questionnaire packet. The packet should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. Your responses will be kept confidential by separating your signature from your completed questionnaire packet. All identifying material (consent forms) will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only by the principal investigator. Identifying material will be destroyed by means of a paper shredder no later than January 2005. In order to further protect confidentiality, please complete the following questionnaire in a location away from your spouse (ex., a separate room). Place your completed questionnaire in the smaller envelope and seal it before placing it in the larger envelope.

If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the principal investigator or the faculty advisor. Their phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you experience any distress due to participation in this study you may contact the faculty advisor whose name and number is at the top of this form to receive a referral for counseling. If you have questions about your rights as a subject or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact Ms. Tracy Lindsay in the Office of Research & Grants Administration at 940-898-3377 or e-mail HSRC@TWU.EDU.

If you agree to be a participant in this study, please sign and date both copies of this consent form and keep one copy for your records.

Signature

Date

Couples who have completed the questionnaires will be entitled to participate in a drawing for gift certificates for restaurants and movie rentals. Both spouses must complete the questionnaire in order to qualify for the drawing. Please complete the following information if you would like to participate in the drawing.

Name	Address	Phone #
------	---------	---------

If you would like a summary of the study results, please complete the following information.

Name	Address	e-mail address (if available)
------	---------	-------------------------------

Appendix D
Hypotheses and Data Analyses

Hypotheses and Data Analyses

<u>Hypothesis</u>	<u>Statistical Test</u>	<u>Results</u>
Hypothesis 1	ANOVA	S
Hypothesis 2	t-test	NS
Hypothesis 3	MANOVA	S
Hypothesis 4	MANOVA	S
Hypothesis 5	ANOVA	S
Hypothesis 6	matched Hotellings t-test	S
Hypothesis 7	ANOVA	S
Hypothesis8	ANOVA	S

S = Significant

NS = Not Significant

Appendix E
Human Subjects Approval Letter

TEXAS WOMAN'S
UNIVERSITY

DENTON/DALLAS/HOUSTON

HUMAN SUBJECTS
REVIEW COMMITTEE
P.O. Box 425619
Denton, TX 76204-5619
Phone: 940/898-3377
Fax: 940/898-3416

May 3, 2000

Ms. Amy Pape
1540 Valley Creek Rd.
Denton, TX 76205

Dear Ms. Pape:


Re: *Conflict Resolution Satisfaction: A Study of Satisfied Marriages across 16 Domains of Marital Conflict*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by a committee of the Human Subjects Review Committee and appears to meet our requirements in regard to protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters obtained should be submitted to the HSRC upon receipt prior to any data collection at that agency. The signed consent forms and an annual/final report are to be filed with the Human Subjects Review Committee at the completion of the study. A copy of your newly approved consent form has been stamped as approved by the HSRC and is attached to this letter. Please use this form which has the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your subjects.

This approval is valid one year from the date of this letter. Furthermore, according to HHS regulations, another review by the Committee is required if your project changes. If you have any questions, please feel free to call the Human Subjects Review Committee at the phone number listed above.

Sincerely,



Dr. Linda Rubin, Chair
Human Subjects Review Committee - Denton

enc.

cc. Dr. Jennifer Martin, Department of Family Sciences
Dr. Frank Thomas, Department of Family Sciences
Graduate School